
ICANN82 | CF – Joint AFRALO-AfrICANN Session
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MICHELLE DESMYTER

Thank you. Hello, welcome everyone to the Joint AFRALO-AfrICANN Session. My name is Michelle DeSmyter and I am the remote participation manager for this session today. 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 this session, questions or comments will only be read aloud if submitted within the Q&A pod. Interpretation for this session will include English, French, and Arabic. If you would 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 record and the language you will speak if speaking a language other than English. Please speak at a reasonable pace. With this, I will now hand the floor over to Hadia Elminiawi, AFRALO Chair.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you so much. This is Hadia Elminiawi for the record. Welcome everyone to the AFRALO-AfrICANN Session at ICANN82. Thank you for being with us today. I would like to start with a very

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warm welcome to Kurtis Erik, President and CEO of ICANN. Welcome, Kurtis, to your first AFRALO-AfrICANN Session. We are truly honored to have you join us and greatly appreciate your time and commitment to engaging with AFRALO.

We look forward to working together to advance inclusivity and meaningful participation within ICANN. This is a special moment for AFRALO, and we are excited to have you with us today. Thank you. We will start with opening remarks by Jonathan Zuck, ALAC Chair. Then we will move on to our guest speakers. And with this, I hand the floor to Jonathan.

JONATHAN ZUCK

Thanks a lot, Hadia, and thanks for having me here at this meeting. Again, my name is Jonathan Zuck for the interpreters and for the record, and I'm the Chair of the At-Large Advisory Committee. And I think that you have chosen a very important topic for this letter, for this meeting, and for this discussion. It's very timely, because I think that there's a misunderstanding sometimes about the value of a local registry. I think that some people think, folks-- maybe now is not the time to talk, okay? All right, thanks. About the value of a local registry, and I think some people question that. Well, if I create a registry that's available for people in Africa to register domains, does that not allow them to have local content and things like that?

And I think, as we've seen in certain community registries like .cat and others, you might have a different set of priorities as a local registry. Your priority might just not be how to make the most

money. It might have a cultural priority, a linguistic priority, an inclusion priority. And with that priority may come some sacrifices to revenue in favor of those other goals. And so I think we need to start from the idea that it is inherently valuable to have a local registry run a local TLD so that it can set priorities that are appropriate to the environment, to the culture, and to the language that it represents. So that's got to be the objective.

And so how do we get there is the question. I was part of the CCT review that looked at the Applicant Support Program in the last round. And one of the things that we did was commission a study whereby we looked at the types of organizations that applied for TLDs from the developed world, for lack of a better term, the global north, and tried to find cohorts, similar organizations in the less developed world, the global south, and literally called them and asked them, why weren't you interested in this program?

And the resounding answer that came back was not understanding a business model associated. How is it worth? It wasn't so much that we don't have the money to apply. It was, is this the best use of our money? Because it's a lot, right? We have it, but should we spend this much money on a TLD without understanding what the benefits or the upsides of that will be?

So one of the things that I think is most exciting about the new program this year is that ICANN has at least taken the experience of the 2012 round and started to produce some kind of case studies, if you will, of different types of TLDs and how they chose to run

themselves so that there's some visibility to the business model that a new applicant for support might take on Board.

The other thing you mentioned in your document is about languages and training, and I think there's some movement along those lines as well, that I think a lot of us in the At-Large community were concerned that the focus on just a few languages for the initial program was maybe too narrow, but now with the inclusion of a use of AI, etc., ICANN has come to the table with a willingness to produce these materials in just about any language that can possibly be done, and hopefully that will be helpful in our efforts as the At-Large community, at least, to evangelize the New gTLD program to communities, non-profits, and others within the African region.

So I think there's a lot to be done. I think we're going to have to keep putting pressure on ICANN to make changing the characteristics of the registry community, to expand it beyond the usual suspects, to make that the priority and not just having a better outreach program, but being results-oriented and getting people engaged in the program, and doing whatever it takes to get people engaged.

And so I'm very supportive of the communiqué you've put together for the Board, and I stand ready, and I think the At-Large community as a whole stands ready to participate actively in making that dream a reality, because it's about time. So thank you for raising this really important issue, I think, at a very important time, and we're ready to help. Thank you.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you so much, Jonathan, for the welcoming remarks, and indeed the title of the topic is Promoting African Digital Identity in the Next gTLD Round, Addressing Challenges and Leveraging Supporting Mechanisms. And with that, I hand the floor to Kurtis. The floor is yours.

KURTIS LINDQVIST

Thank you, Hadia. So on behalf of the ICANN Org, welcome, everyone, to ICANN82 and to all the AFRALO and AfrICANN. That's a bit of a mouthful in one word. This is my first opportunity to meet all of you as the incoming president and CEO, or actually not incoming, I am the president and CEO, but it's my first chance to meet with you, and I thank you for inviting me here today. I really look forward to working together with the community and all of you to help overcome but also understand the challenges that are unique, but also the many opportunities in your region, because it is one of the fastest growing, and the next billion users coming online will come from this region.

I'm very impressed, I've learned earlier today that this is the 37th meeting of this community, and you have met at almost all ICANN meetings since 2010, which I think is quite phenomenal. So I'm very impressed by that, to see this ongoing commitment to ICANN and to the community.

And following up to what we talked about, the statement of promoting the African Identity in The Next gTLD Round, Addressing

Challenges and Leveraging Support Mechanisms, I think highlights a lot of very important points that are actually in the consideration for the New gTLD program. We talked about the enhancing awareness and capacity building to educate the African stakeholders, and to advocate more IDN and Universal Acceptance, and this is work that we have done a lot of work around, that we continue to do, and we continue to push for.

We're working together with both the ICANN's own outreach staff, and together with Smart Africa, that I met on Friday, so I think we do a lot of this work in this area to highlight this. And following on to that, to prioritize linguistic and cultural diversity, I think the work on IDN and universal acceptance is very fundamental to ensure that there is linguistic diversity and enable that. And I think, on a personal note, I think that will be a key factor in actually enabling that next billion to come online, is that we have that linguistic support and diversity.

The communiqué talks about the strengthening of the Applicant Support Programs to training, again, something that we very much endorse and that we have been working very heavily on as ICANN, so that's something we very much support. Empowering the African At-Large structures in the program, I think that's very, very important. We have the ambassador programs, which is something that I know that we discussed with some of the other At-Large, with the RALOs about, to participate and build on, which I think is very useful. And really an opportunity for the RALOs to play a very important role and the At-Large community in this.

Streamlining the next round of application processes and then advocating for the equitable and inclusive outcomes, I think that's all something that we all endorse, and that's why we have the Applicant Support Program, is to ensure that we actually have that extra outreach and can reach this further. And as I said, the statement really urges the At-Large structures and individual members, to play an active role in raising the awareness around the Applicant Support Program, which is, again, something I think is very important, and when the ambassador program is specifically designed to help with and make sure we get this outreach to raise the awareness.

And I think, to come back to what Jonathan talked about, is the importance of the wider community understanding that the next round does open up a completely new opportunity that hasn't necessarily been there, and, well, not since 2012, but also this time around to make sure there is much more awareness and that we will see much more applications and that we did last time from these areas.

And I think this is really the chance to also build on this language diversity, to have applications in the next round that are linguistically diverse and actually support the local scripts and languages. And I think that's really something we need to build on and take into account. Because it's not just that we have the second level domains, which is often the case today, but actually starting from the beginning, that stringed entire label, if you want, is supported.

And as ICANN will continue to support and counting on the African community to help them really reach success in the next round in these areas and in the region in Africa. And that's really what we're hoping to achieve with this. And we will continue to work with you and support that. So thank you for having me and welcome again.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you so much. This is Hadia, for the record. I think you might have a few minutes to take a question or two. So I open the floor for maybe one or two questions to President and CEO of ICANN, Kurtis. Do we have? Okay, Hervé, please go ahead.

SETONDJH HOUNZANDJI

I'm going to speak in French. Hervé Setondji Hounzandji Thank you, Mr. President of ICANN. You have already read our statement, I can tell by the way you spoke about it. Thank you so much. It's quite nice. Everything that you mentioned in the statement that I will read further on, we talked about it before this session. When it comes to the Applicant Support Program, I did my own calculation, and I would like to talk to you about this. We started at \$227,000 for each applicant. And the program can bring us 80%, a discount of 80%. When I do the math, I'm at more than \$30,000.

Personally, I'm from Africa, I'm from Benin, \$30,000 is quite a lot of money. I just wanted to ask you, well, if you want to help the African countries, you shouldn't have the same price. The price shouldn't be the same for everyone. The price should be adapted to the region, because there are people that can't eat, but they

want to be present on the internet, and they can't afford \$30,000. \$30,000 don't even include the fees, the implementation fees. Thank you, Mr. President.

KURTIS LINDQVIST

Sir, thank you. And I'm sorry I will respond in English. I did follow a bit of the French, but not all of it. So I wasn't actually on the Board. This predates my time at ICANN, but let me explain what I understand. I think Alan might know more about this than I do, so he can correct me. So, first of all, the discount is actually a span between 75-85%, depending on the number of applications, right? So it's not a fixed 80% fee. It can depend on the number of applications, and the calculation behind that was to recover the cost of the applicant program, right? So as ICANN, we will have a cost for those applications, even when they come from countries where the purchasing power might be very low, we still have the same cost of this.

And I think, if I'm understanding correctly, there was a discussion about having this tiered system that has a number of complexities, and how do you do that per country, and how do you determine where an applicant is actually based and what their purchasing power is, because you could use this as a proxy system and so on. And I believe, and I'm looking at my Board members who were there when this discussion was had, I believe that this was decided as the most fair and equitable outcome, and I'm looking if they might know more, because this predates my time on ICANN, but I think that was some of the reasoning behind this.

LEON SÁNCHEZ

The most fair and equitable solution at hand, because there are those of us who advocated for something more, but were not successful.

ALAN BARRETT

This is Alan Barrett, let me try to add a little to that. The new gTLD program is intended to be on a cost recovery basis, it's not making any profit for ICANN, so the fees are set at a level which is supposed to recover the costs without making any profit. And the costs are maybe a lot higher than you would expect, because there are lots of experts and committees that have to be constituted for all kinds of reviews. It does add up, I've seen the numbers broken down into like 30 different categories of things that have to be reviewed, contractors that have to be paid for different parts of it. So yes, \$227,000 is a lot of money, even if you get an 85% reduction, that's still what, \$35,000, \$40,000, that's still a lot. And yeah, I'm afraid there's not much we can do about it, those are the fees.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you, Alan and Kurtis, for the highlights, and Leon. Jonathan, do you want to respond to the same question, like, comment on it?

JONATHAN ZUCK

Yeah, just, I think part of the reasoning is that the hosting of a TLD is expensive in and of itself, in other words, if an applicant meets some minimum threshold for the application fee, it creates a great

deal of pessimism about their ability to deliver the services necessary to host the ultimate TLD. And it's a very tricky question. And I think reveals a systemic problem that still needs to be addressed.

We have a very interesting TLD in the form of PIR that's run by a non-profit, and I wonder if we should be more aggressively looking at a non-profit running a registry service provider, so that there's this idea that it doesn't-- so that the act of having a TLD doesn't have these minimum requirements associated with it, so that I'm going to run a TLD, and I'm only going to have 500 applicants, maybe, but that's okay, because I'm working with this non-profit registry service provider that does a bunch of them, and it's just one more, and it doesn't need to cost as much on an economy of scale.

So I think this problem is partly because there's this anticipation you're going to have to spend a lot of money to host a TLD. So this is sort of an indicator that you've got some money, or otherwise you're going to fail eventually. But maybe that's the problem we need to address first, is how to prevent that failure.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you, thank you so much Jonathan, and one more question from Lucky, .africa.

LUCKY MASILELA

Thank you, I think I wanted to add to the question around numbers and the challenges or opportunities, depending why you look at this. In the last round, 2012, there were 13 names that were applied

for Africa. And of those 13 names, there is only five that are active today, that is .mtn, .africa, .capetown, .durban, and .joburg. Combined, all of these numbers are shy of 72,000 registrations. So it immediately paints a picture that if we had spent \$85,000 then per name, times four, we probably haven't recovered what we spent then. If you discounted today, I don't see any business case for an individual the way we have structured.

The only thing that I see in this is a city or a county applying for the name and using it as a service delivery tool, allowing for all the residents to be granted domain names or email addresses for them to receive their bills, utility bills. So you have created scale and you are going to be able to realize your revenue much quicker and certainly. The other model that we have, it's not going to be easy for the continent. Thank you.

KURTIS LINDQVIST

I'm just going to add one thing. I think that's probably true, but I want to come back to what Jonathan said originally. That is also a bit market maturity, right? How do you build that market maturity? I did actually at one point study the less than dollar a day economy in Africa. It actually is quite a vibrant economy because it's a phenomenally large economy.

And I think that, I'm not saying that that's the target group for this, but I do think that there is a sizing thing that you could actually make this, but you have to create the, to Jonathan's point, is how do you create this appeal for it in the first place? You know, why do people want to have an online identity in the first place? And that's

the market maturity that I think is lacking and you need to build that exactly to your point to make sure you can recover the cost, right?

And I think that we should all do more in bringing Africa into that market maturity because it is a phenomenally large market, but just like we in Europe or the US or wherever have this desire to have an online identity and we can see value in that. How do we develop that same thing in a market like Africa? And I think that's where there needs to be more work done. I think that's the solution to your problem, right?

And I'm not an expert in that market. Jonathan probably knows more than I do, but I think there is more that can be done. I'm really sorry, but I need to go to the next meeting. So thank you very much for having me and look forward to meeting you again and having some more discussions. Thank you.

HADIA ELMINIAMI

Thank you so much. Part of what we've been talking about is actually part of the recommendations in the statement as well. And with that, I would like to go to Alan Barrett, a Board director member. We'll have more time. Now we go through the guest of list, a guest of speakers. So now we go to Alan Barrett, Board director member from Africa. Alan, the floor is yours.

ALAN BARRETT

Thank you, Hadia. This is Alan Barrett again. So it's always a pleasure to join these meetings and this time I'm lucky that I don't

have any conflicts. I can stay for the whole time. I'm pleased of that. As usual, this is a very well-written and timely statement. We've come to expect that from this community. I think that digital inclusion for Africa is very important. I see mentioned in this statement of New gTLDs, which of course are very timely, that's being launched now.

The Applicant Support Program is already open. There have already been some applications from African organizations. Essentially the requirement, we've already talked about the 75 - 85% fee reduction, but essentially the requirement to apply is you have to be a non-profit and you have to demonstrate that you have the ability to operate a TLD if you are awarded it.

Then there's also the issue of universal acceptance for email addresses and domain names in all kinds of online media. I see that in the statement as well, so that's good. I was going to speak about the Applicant Support Program as part of this little talk, but I think we've talked about that enough already, so I'm going to cut it off there. Thanks very much, Hadia.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you, Alan, so much. Now I go to Dr. Catherine Adeya. She's a Board director member also from Africa. Dr. Catherine, the floor is yours.

CATHERINE ADEYA

Thank you very much, Hadia. Initially I was thinking of giving my comments as a Board member, but I think it's also important to

give comments from lived experience, having worked in the government in Africa, working with the regulators, and understanding all these problems that we keep talking about. So mine is also from lived experience. But I must admit, and I agree with Jonathan spot on, I thought it was a very thoughtful topic, very timely as well, and it's really part of our Boardroom discussions as well, and promoting African digital identity in the next gTLD round.

I shared this with some parliamentarians in Kenya, just a topic like this, and they stood there and said, when you can speak the language, better come back and talk to us. But I know your team is doing a great, great job, and they're beginning to understand more, and they're better able to articulate it. So it will address some of the issues we keep seeing, the regulatory challenges, the slowness of policy, the government support, because some of them say, and Fiona, you can support me in this, we want to support, but how do we support? And I think that's a very valid question. But again, I'm just saying that you've been doing quite a bit of work there, and a number of them are becoming more educated in this area.

But in reading the statement, I mean, some of the challenges that have been voiced are challenges that are not necessarily unique to this, but still need to be emphasized further. And of course, Jonathan, you've spoken to the financial barriers, and it's more complex than sometimes being spread out, and of course, some people might say, oh, you whinge every time you hear somebody say in Africa, Africa, Africa, but you understand the complexity, the different levels, different issues.

I saw some of the challenges about the limited government support, and I've shared what has come out of that. I know there's a lot of effort going on, not only from ICANN, but even from some of them, just to understand a little bit better. But again, this time, as you say, ICANN I think has made more of an effort with the Applicant Support Program, and increasingly people are trying to understand and to see how they can be able to use this to address some of the financial and resource constraints.

My encouragement just to my fellow Africans, and here I'm using it generally, whether it's to your governments or people who have an influence, what you've learned, always find a way to trickle it down. You can also do it ourselves, because there's always this reliance that somebody has to come and help us from a technical level, but there's so many people who have also been trained, and I'm finding them sitting down and saying ICANN needs to come, or somebody needs to come.

Just do what you can at your level, because this now requires all hands on deck. I think I'll just, maybe I'll leave it there. Already there have been quite a few discussions. There's a lot of things I was passionate to discuss. The CEO discussed them, and the Q&A section with him could have just almost been enough to allow others to engage as well, but thank you.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you, Dr. Catherine, and I hope you all have more time after the introduction of the statement to make further comments. I

would like now to go to Leon Chanze, ICANN Board Director selected by At-Large.

LEON SÁNCHEZ

Thank you very much, Hadia, and thank you everyone for having me again here. I always state, and I will state it again, this is one of my favorite sessions in every ICANN meeting, and I am very grateful that you keep inviting me, and happy to share some thoughts. Of course, I don't want to take too much of your time, because the substantive discussion still needs to take place, and it's not for us to have that discussion, but to listen and to learn from you.

I just want to concentrate on one of the many topics that you touch upon in your statement, and it's to leverage the possible partnerships to promote this identity, this African identity in the next round of New gTLDs, and I think that one of the strongest partnerships you can leverage is that of the ALSs you have on ground, along with the local authorities, and of course, from the support programs that you could have access from ICANN.

So, seize the opportunity to leverage those partnerships, to build those alliances, to ask for support, and to meaningfully create this or raise this awareness about the New gTLD or the next round of New gTLDs in Africa, how it could benefit the African society, how it could be beneficial for the African internet ecosystem. And, well, you have plenty of allies in the Board to help you achieve those goals.

So, again, I'm just one click away, and I'm pretty sure that I could say the same for my colleagues here. They are also one click away. Reach out, and we'll be happy to support you in the best way we can. Thank you.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you, Leon, so much. And indeed, partnerships are part of the way forward. And with that, I hand the floor to Baher Esmat, Vice President, Stakeholder Engagement-Middle East and Managing Director, Middle East Africa.

BAHER ESMAT

Thank you, Hadia, and good afternoon, everyone. It's always a pleasure to attend the AFRALO-AfrICANN session and to participate in your discussions. Today's topic is, indeed, important and a timely topic. And as part of the engagement team at ICANN, my team and I have been conducting significant engagement efforts on this topic over the past year. We also work closely with the Africa team to support their efforts in North Africa, in the North African part.

Part of our engagement is, of course, with the At-Large structures and the At-Large community, and I'm glad to see that one of the recommendations in your statement, actually the first one, is to work with global stakeholder engagement team at ICANN on raising awareness and building capacities, and this is something we are already doing to some extent but would welcome the

opportunity to do more in collaboration with the At-Large community in Africa.

Of course, the Istanbul office brings expertise in different functions of ICANN, including functions related to the next round and other programs like IDNs and UA, and I can say that we have all the resources needed to engage and raise more awareness on these topics across the African continent. So again, thank you for the opportunity, and I look forward to the discussion.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you so much, Behar, and we always look forward to collaborating with stakeholder engagement in the Middle East and Africa. Pierre Dandjinou, Vice President for Africa, the floor is yours.

PIERRE DANDJINOU

Thank you very much and good afternoon to everyone. I think mine is going to be simple, to thank you for having me here. But as you certainly know, we at GSE Africa have been working closely with you, and in that topic also there are so many things we have to say. You pointed out a few things that we, I would say, have already started organizing ourselves on those things. We are spreading the word, for instance. We've been in different places, and at time your group has really assisted us.

We are planning a few events, and then I would think that you should be joining in, one being the Africa Internet Summit. The others are also the Africa DNS Forum, engagement forum that we are having. We are planning for early December in Accra. This is

something that we really wanted. Because we really wanted to localize this New gTLD program. As you can see, this has become our priority for 2025. Of course, beside our other different activities that we are conducting in Africa, this New gTLD, especially the ISP, have become our priority all the yearlong.

So just to thank you again for your collaboration. We are participating to your regular meetings, weekly meetings or monthly meetings. And it's just about thanking you again and asking for more collaboration from your part. Thank you.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you so much, Pierre, and indeed, we've been working closely with Global Stakeholder Engagement Africa, and thank you so much for all the support you've been providing to the community, and we continue actually to work together and rely on your support. And with that, I would like to turn the floor to Aziz Hilali for the introduction of the statement, of the topic.

AZIZ HILALI

Thank you. This statement is the result of a deep discussion within our community. Our goal is simple, help Africa build a strong digital identity in the next round on New gTLD by overcoming challenges and using a valuable support program. Why this statement is necessary? In the last round, only 17 applications came from Africa out of 1930, and very few were approved. That's only 0.2% of all gTLD going to African applicants. If we don't act now, the same thing will happen again. ICANN Application Support Program, ASP,

was designed to help underrepresented regions, which is great, but just having a program isn't enough.

African applicants need real support, knowledge, and the resources to take full advantage of it. This week, we learned that only four African applicants have been submitted, and they came from only two countries. This clearly shows that the ASP is not working as expected and needs to be improved to provide better support to African applicants.

What are the key actions we propose? One, raise awareness and build capacity, work with ICANN, the African Union, and others to train and inform African stakeholders about gTLD opportunities.

Two, encourage investment. Government and business should see gTLD as a tool of digital growth, not just a cost.

Three, build partnerships, work with ccTLD, IFTLD, AFRINIC, and local registries to reduce costs and access technical expertise. Partnerships should also focus on promoting the use of African scripts and domain names to reflect the continent's rich linguistic diversity.

Four, support community-based gTLDs. A multi-stakeholder approach can make African registries more inclusive and sustainable.

Five, make the ASP more effective. The program should be easier to access, fit local realities, and provide hands-on support from

African experts. It should also include practical training on financial, legal, and technical skills needed to run a registry.

Six, strengthen the role of ILS. ILS groups are key to raising awareness, helping candidates, and ensuring African voices are heard in the domain namespace. ICANN should support them with training and resources.

Seven, simplify the application process, cut administrative and financial barriers that more African SMEs and communities can apply.

Eight, ensure fair gTLD allocation. ICANN should include regional and linguistic diversity criteria to balance past inequality.

Finally, what's next? The next round of gTLD is a huge chance for Africa. We can't afford to be just spectators. We need to act and be part of the game. With strong community engagement, smart use of resources, and political commitment, we can make sure Africa has a strong place in the global Internet governance ecosystem. Thank you.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you so much, Aziz, for introducing the topic. And I now turn the floor to Bram Fudzulani, AFRALO vice chair, in order to discuss the statement. Bram, the floor is yours.

BRAM FUDZULANI

Thank you, Hadia. Bram, for the record. At this point in time, I will invite questions, comments, or modifications that we see fit for the

statement before we adopt it. So, the floor is open. You can put up your hand, and I'll give you the mic. Thank you.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Fiona, you had a comment or a question with regard to the document?

FIONA ASONGA

To the CEO. Sorry, he's already left.

AZIZ HILALI

Excuse me. Hadia, we missed a point of the declaration of the statement.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

So, maybe we can turn the floor to Hervé to read the statement briefly. Hervé Setondji is the AFRALO secretary, and the floor is yours.

SETONDJI HOUNZANDJI

Okay, thank you, Hadia. Setondji is speaking. So, I would like to read the statement in French. Thank you very much for the members that are still with us from the Board. Thank you so much for being with us. And I believe that you all read that statement. Thank you so much. But I'm going to briefly read it, not take too much time. So, we have some issues about the context.

So, previous round of the new gTLD program revealed a significant disparity in applications from different regions. Out of approximately 1,900 applications worldwide, only 17 were submitted by applicants based in Africa. This striking contrast highlights the existing challenges and barriers faced by African entities in participating in a global digital landscape.

Secondly, on those applicants, very few new gTLDs were ultimately delegated to African applicants, representing a very small proportion of the total delegation. This underscores a clear underrepresentation of the African continent in the namespace, representing about 0.2% of the total of 1,351 new gTLDs awarded worldwide. This reinforces the need for targeted interventions to correct this imbalance.

And what I'm going to try to do now, I'm not going to read the entire declaration, but I'm going to choose a few very important points. I don't have an order of preference, but the first point will be linguistic and cultural diversity. New gTLDs should be considered as a vehicle for celebrating and preserving the richness of Africa's linguistic and cultural diversity. And we urge ICANN to establish criteria that favor applications promoting African languages, scripts, and cultural expressions.

Then we want to improve the responsiveness of the ASP, and we believe that ICANN must ensure that the ASP is designed and implemented to specifically address the challenges faced by African applicants and that information is easily accessible in different forms and in different languages. This requires a localized

and proactive approach, potentially including training, financial assistance, and personalized advice that considers the realities of each Africa sub-region.

We talked about empowering the ALSs, the African At-Large Structures. We urge ICANN to support African ALSs in their role as catalysts for raising awareness and promoting the ASP. This includes providing them with resources and training to actively engage their local communities and potential applicants. This on-the-ground knowledge of the different situations across the continent is absolutely essential to ensure the success of the ASP. We would like to talk about the streamlining of the application process.

We recommend that ICANN streamline the application process to make it more user-friendly, affordable, and inclusive, especially for MSMEs and communities with limited resources. The complexity and costs associated, we talked about it, the applicant process should not be a barrier to participation. Lastly, we'd like to advocate for a more equitable and inclusive outcome. Given Africa's under-representation in the previous round, ICANN should actively work to ensure that the applicant evaluation process doesn't perpetuate existing prejudices and biases and aims to increase the number of gTLDs delegated to African applicants.

In conclusion, the next round of the new gTLD program is a unique opportunity for Africa to strengthen its digital presence, the African languages, and make sure we have a stronger and more inclusive space showing the diversity of the continent. We can be more

innovative and we can have some identifiers that are unique for Africa and we want also a secure internet for Africa.

This is a great opportunity to be more present in the DEM space with its own identity. So we can do better than the first round. We can have a mechanism of supporting the candidates and Africa will be able to be more active in the ecosystem. Lastly, if launching a new gTLD requires huge investments, Africans do not have to do this alone. Leveraging all possible support is the key to success. Thank you very much for your attention.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you so much, Hervé. So now that we had Hervé reading out the statement for us, maybe you now have some thoughts or modifications, amendments to the statement. Jonathan, I thought you had something.

JONATHAN ZUCK

I do, and I don't know how appropriate it is for me to make a suggestion here, but I feel like the last section is very important. What is it, number 12 that was in there? About advocating for more equitable outcomes. I think that something more dramatic to say might be that while it may be too late in this process for this round, the true diversity is only going to come when we lower the threshold for participation in the program as a whole.

We're missing the point on application fees. It has to stop being a rich man's game and start being something that really is available to everyone, regardless of their economic status. And I feel like the

ICANN Org, together with the community, needs to really work on that problem, lowering the threshold for participation generally.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you, Jonathan, indeed. And maybe the way forward now with the program as it is, is partnerships, like collaborating and partnering with other players. Dr. Catherine, I thought you also had some comments.

CATHERINE ADEYA

I think I would really like to hear from the rest. I've been seeing you putting your hand up quite a bit. But to Jonathan's point, as much as you say that right now it's about partnerships, let's not lose sight of what he's saying. I think you're on to something, and that discussion needs to be heard. Whenever you're looking at something futuristically, don't just focus just on the now. So yes, there's this now happening, but there's something.

Because what we are hearing out there, no matter how much you're doing, even as I sit on the Board, as I sit elsewhere, goes to the very point you're saying. So I didn't want to really say it like that, but it's the reality. So we shouldn't lose sight of it completely, even if right now we've already moved on, but it's something that should be left on the bunsen burner. But let it not be about me, because I have the mic, I'm a Board member, I can speak anytime. I'm seeing so many people who would like to speak, and I think his hand has been up.

HADIA ELMINIAWI I will turn the floor to Bham in order to manage the floor and the discussion.

CATHERINE ADEYA Bham could manage, but I'm just wondering if somebody has an urgent two-point, because you seem to be--

BRAM FUDZULANI You can go ahead, go ahead.

SAMWEL KARIUKI KINUTHIA Okay, thank you very much. I just want to come back in the quick point regarding the proposition you made in the declaration. I didn't see something related on the mentorship really. I heard about capacity building, I heard about some process to support the ISP, but I don't know for our community, this community, ALAC community, I think it could be great to have like some concrete actions. This concrete action could be like a mentorship program we can have in the community, because we have lots of people here in the ALAC community have some background and some experience. We can organize to support the ISP program, like to build this kind of mentorship and to see how we can maintain it.

This is something could be, target something like community of practice for this kind of thing, to support the community. I'm sure that the people who come to apply for this New gTLDs could be like a private sector for most of them, but I think that in the civil society

as well, we can have, people can apply. So this kind of community of practice could be useful, I think. This is what I want to say. I don't know in the declaration if any point could cover this. I don't know, perhaps you can just emphasize me this, but I think it's very important to go to this kind of mentorship. Thank you.

BRAM FUDZULANI

Thank you. Fiona?

FIONA ASONGA

I think when it comes to the New gTLD application process, if we say that we want it to be equitable and we're looking at the African region and we want to see more African applications, there are many things that we need to consider that haven't yet been put in place. And so we are like putting the wagon before the horse and hoping that somehow we will get to the time for application and we shall be there. It's not that the GSE team is not doing a good job, they're doing a lot, but a lot more needs to be done. And there are a lot more that needs to be done, needs more than just the GSE team working on awareness and capacity building on the ground.

There are several approaches that we need to think about and need to consider, and one of those has to do with the way the gTLD applications go in. Must I apply with, say, the ability to run the registry myself? When we begin to look at it that way, then clearly we already get cold feet and we can't do it and we back out. But when the application process considers other arrangements that I could have, in the sense that if I'm putting in an application, I'm not

expected to also own the registry, but I can subcontract to, say, .Zedna to manage for me my domain, an already existing registry that is recognized within the ICANN ecosystem. And if those kinds of arrangements can be made, the community within Africa, the private sector that you're saying needs to come in and invest in it, are made aware of this, then we can make some headway.

What I have seen happen is that there is an understanding that if I'm going to put in an application, I must be able to handle the domain end-to-end, everything, and put in everything into that application. When we look at it that way, sometimes you are hesitant to lock in partners when you're not sure you already have been allowed to have the domain and to run with it. So it's a what comes first, is it the hen or the chicken? So because we are caught in that situation, we are in a region that has the next 1 billion, a large percentage of them being below the \$1 economy, but all going digital, with governments driving a digital agenda.

There are up to 18 countries so far with a digital economy agenda, so that means they want their population, their citizens, to get online. Do we have sufficient domains for them to be able to do this? So we need to have this conversation and be able to run it a bit more before we are able to concrete it and say, okay, this is where we need ICANN to come in and really, really help us. Because yes, you're giving us the discount, but the application process, how is it? Thank you.

BRAM FUDZULANI

Bram for the record, again. We are running out of time. We have four minutes to go. I'll give Lucky one minute and then we let Hadia wrap up. Thank you.

LUCKY MASILELA

Lucky for the record. One minute is a lot of time. Two things. The first one on this statement, I think it reads very well. It addresses the critical things. What we need to do is sanitize the numbers, the 17 applications, but there were 13 that were awarded and there are five that are active. So we just need to sanitize that number so that it's consistent.

And then number 10, I think we need to beef it up with the real actions, the things that Fiona is talking to that I mentioned, whereby the application must be outsourced. Somebody must support in the application. You must have a build, operate, transfer, and RSP must do that. End users get a community or a city or a county to be the one that applies. There is a business case there, but not for an individual. Thank you.

BRAM FUDZULANI

Thank you. Hadia, back to you.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you so much, Bram. And the two things that I have noted, one is with regard to mentoring programs and workshops. And we already, I think we did mention this in the statement, but maybe we can elaborate more on it. With regard also to mentorship, so I

would say that applicants that qualify for support will be eligible for financial and non-financial assistance. And this non-financial assistance includes Applicant Support Program, capacity development program. So this, it's in there already.

But as RALOs and At-Large structures, we also do a lot of effort in that area. And as AFRALO, we are planning actually a workshop. And the other point that I have noted is with regard to bullet point number 10, empowering African At-Large structures, expanding more on that bullet, and also highlighting the importance of having a successful business model. Yeah.

CATHERINE ADEYA

Yeah, because of time, and there were two things I picked out and you've picked out one of them as well. And that was on item number three. And just strengthening it to be very, very clear. You've talked about the mentorship. There's a lot happening there, but it's a very powerful one in terms of leveraging the partnerships that Fiona was talking about, but it goes to what you're saying. Strengthen it and just be very certain about what you want. And then number 12, that Jonathan is talking about, it's very loaded. There's a lot that could happen there. But I must say this was a very well written statement, a very refreshing read. And yeah, all the best.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you so much, Catherine. And thank you to the penholders. Thank you so much, Aziz Hilali, and all penholders. And with this, this session is adjourned. Okay. Dave, go ahead.

DAVE KISSOONDOYAL

Yes. Thank you very much, Hadia. I want members to be aware that the application period for the NomCom is still open until the 28th of March. Just a reminder that we are selecting three positions for the ICANN Board of Directors. Three positions for the ALAC, out of which one for AFRALO. There is one position for the ccNSO, two positions for GNSO, and one position for the PTI Board of Directors. And the deadline is the 28th of March. Thank you very much.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you so much, Dave. And Dave is ALAC AFRALO delegate to the NomCom. And so to conclude, the statement is approved. Pending some amendments with regard to mentoring and capacity building, with regard to item number 10, and item number 3, and item number 12. Thank you.

[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]