
ICANN82 | CF – Welcome Ceremony
Monday, March 10, 2025 – 09:00 to 10:15 PST

TED BARTLES Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Naela Sarras, Vice President, Global Stakeholder Engagement, North America.

NAELA SARRAS I would like to begin by acknowledging that we are in the traditional land of the first people of Seattle, the Duwamish people, past, present, and future, and honor with gratitude the land itself and the Duwamish tribe. Chair of the ICANN Board, Tripti Sinha, President and CEO of ICANN, Kurtis Lindquist, esteemed excellencies and guests, thank you for being here.

Welcome to ICANN82, the community forum in Seattle. It's my great pleasure to welcome you all to what promises to be an exciting week ahead. Whether this is your first time or you're joining us as a returning participant, we are thrilled to have you here. And speaking of being here, I'd like to take a moment to appreciate the impressive numbers of people that are joining us for this meeting.

We have 1,826 people registered to attend in person, and another 493 participants joining us remotely, and 1,136 of you have already picked up badges as of yesterday, and we'll continue to see these numbers grow throughout the week. It's inspiring to see such

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strong engagement, and it underscores the importance of our collective efforts.

This week is about much more than just attending sessions. It's a chance to collaborate, share ideas, and inspire each other. With dozens of sessions, discussions, private meetings all lined up, the opportunities for learning and growth are endless. But beyond the formal schedule, this is also a space where impromptu conversations and spontaneous collaborations can spark new insights.

Whether you're stepping into a scheduled session, grabbing a coffee with a colleague, or connecting remotely, every moment here is an opportunity to connect and push the boundaries of what we can accomplish together. Every voice is important, and we want to be mindful and inclusive of all the participants to ensure everyone feels valued, heard, and connected.

Let me also take a moment to welcome the new faces in the room. We're glad you're here. I encourage you to dive in, engage, ask questions, and make connections. You're a vital part of the conversation. And to those of you who have been to ICANN meetings before, take a moment to introduce yourself, share your experiences, and help create an environment where everyone feels empowered to contribute. While this meeting is crucial for advancing our work, let's also take time to enjoy Seattle, its stunning views, vibrant culture, and innovative spirit.

Let's recharge and reflect so we can return to the important work we're here to do with renewed energy. Again, thank you all for

being here. And now it's my honor to hand the floor to our President and CEO, Kurtis Lindquist, for his remarks.

KURTIS LINDQUIST

Your Excellencies and colleagues, welcome. It's a privilege to be here with all of you at ICANN82, my first public meeting as President and CEO. It's hard to believe that I'm now over 90 days into my role at ICANN, or 91 if you're counting. On a fast trajectory, it would take 90 days to reach Mars. And while I definitely racked up a few air miles, I haven't quite covered that much distance, which I'm sure Xavier and the finance team are quite grateful for.

This weekend, we celebrated International Women's Day. And I want to take a moment together to recognize a truly accomplished woman who also was instrumental in ICANN's history, Zita Wenzel. I'm sad to say that Zita passed away last month. Zita was a member of the team that worked to transition oversight of IANA to a new independent organization called ICANN. She worked at USC's Information Sciences Institute alongside Jon Postel.

Upon Jon's unexpected passing, Zita worked tirelessly to bring his vision of ICANN to life. At the first ever ICANN board meeting, she was elected Interim Vice President, Interim Chief Financial Officer, and Interim Secretary. After ICANN was established, Zita continued her work at ISI and served as the Administrator of .US, eventually leading the efforts to transfer the Administrator of .US to Verisign in 2000, earning her a Meritorious Service Award from ISI.

She was active in the ccNSO's predecessor, the Worldwide Alliance of Top-Level Domains. Zita, passed three weeks ago and wrote her own obituary. In it, she said that she loved to accomplish things. Her life is testament to this with a vibrant array of incredible achievements, a BA in Psychology, English, French, and Dance. She had an MFA in Dance, a PhD in Neuropsychology, a postdoctoral NIH fellowship at USC. She was a brain surgeon for rats, worked as a music therapist, volunteered at Red Cross, trained with the Joffrey Ballet, founded the first virtual ballet company, and even recently completed her EMT training and certification from UCLA.

A current running through all her achievements and accolades is Zita's passion for making the world a better and happier place. We are joined today by her husband, Randy Bush, and on behalf of all of us at ICANN, I offer my sincere condolences to Randy and all of those who knew her.

I'd like to express my appreciation for the very warm welcome I have received from this community in these initial months at ICANN. There are many of you that I have yet to meet, however, I have felt very welcomed by those of you I have been able to spend time with in these first few months. I appreciate those of you who have taken time to write, to send your best wishes for the start of my ICANN journey.

ICANN is a unique organization, and one of the fantastic things about it is that everyone has an opinion. People often smile when I say this, but I actually truly mean it when I talk about how great it is to have so many people with strong opinions in ICANN's work. It

shows how deeply engaged, passionate, and committed we all are to ICANN's mission, and the opposite would be far more concerning. As many of you know, different opinions and experiences mean that we don't always agree. That's natural, and in fact, it's necessary.

The multistakeholder model is built to address differences, to facilitate discussions that allow us to explore both common ground and divergence, and ultimately, to reach consensus. This process is at the heart of ICANN's Policy Development. It is what makes our work legitimate, transparent, and effective. Yet, not everyone shares this view. This year, we will see important discussions on the future of Internet governance at the World Summit on Information Society 20-year review. We firmly believe that the multistakeholder model is a success. It has helped ensure a stable, secure, and interoperable Internet, while providing a proven structure for policy development.

The Internet Governance Forum remains a key venue for these discussions. We strongly support its continued role, but even more than that, we believe that IGF should not just continue, but be strengthened and made permanent. Just last month, ICANN, together with the International Telecommunication Union, co-hosted two WSIS+20-related briefings for diplomats, one in New York, co-hosted by the Permanent Mission of Finland and South Africa, and another one in Geneva, co-hosted by the Permanent Mission of Finland.

I had the opportunity to present to an audience in Geneva, and my colleague, Teresa Swinehart, represented ICANN in New York. This is another example of how ICANN partners with the ITU. This partnership is even more important in the year of the WSIS+20 review. As you know, we follow the developments in New York actively and partner with the other ISTAR organizations and our supporting organizations and advisory committees in this effort.

I also want to congratulate the Universal Acceptance Steering Group on its 10-year anniversary. The contributions from the community have enabled us to turn a focus from UA awareness to the implementation and operationalization of universal acceptance, which is an essential part to a digital inclusive Internet.

Over the past few months, I have had the opportunity to meet with many of you, and I very much look forward to meeting more of you this week and as my work continues. I'm grateful to the leaders from ICANN's SO and ACs for their discussions with me. These have been invaluable, offering insights into your concerns, challenges, and opportunities. One recurring theme has been ensuring the efficiency of Policy Development and Implementation. Developing policy is not just about reaching an end goal of consensus as fast as we can. It is vital that our policy development lays the foundation for a smooth implementation.

This means we must identify and address implementation concerns early in the process. A more robust, predictable, and streamlined approach will help us make progress faster while maintaining ICANN's commitment to bottom-up, community-

driven decision-making. And together, this is something that we will continue to refine. At the same time, within ICANN itself, we are reviewing how we work in these first three months. I have spent time with ICANN staff in Singapore and Los Angeles, and I have met ICANN staff at engagement events like the IGF and APRICOT 2025. I look forward to visiting our Brussels office early next month. And on a personal level, it has been wonderful to put faces to names in emails and be able to see the great work our ICANN teams carry out across the globe.

At ICANN, we demand high standards of work from our teams, and it can be easy to overlook how incredible it is to have such a talented group of people work together over time zones on a range of technical and non-technical projects. Together with ICANN staff, we have been looking at ways to work more effectively, more agile, and with better tools. These internal improvements are critical to ensuring that ICANN can support the community efficiently. One area of clear focus is the Next Round of New gTLD program. We are working towards the agreed timeline, ensuring that all milestones are met.

Significant efforts are underway, including work on the registry agreement and the necessary technical tooling to ensure we are fully prepared. This is a major undertaking, and we are committed to getting it right. In late November, we hit two important landmarks in our preparations for the Next Round of the New gTLD program, the launch of the Applicant Support Program, and the Registry Service Provider Evaluation Program.

These two important programs are the results of intense work and collaboration across ICANN, integrating stakeholder feedback at every stage. To date, there are 17 draft Applicant Support Program applications, and 23 organizations have taken initial steps in preparing to apply for the RSP Evaluation Program. These programs are crucial for the success of the next round, with a focus on expanding and deepening awareness of New gTLDs, and in the case of the Applicant Support Program, actively encouraging and supporting participation from underrepresented populations.

Last month, ICANN also published the last tranche of individual Applicant Guidebook topics for public comment. This is a major step, and means we remain on track to publish a full draft Applicant Guidebook for comment at the end of the May. Another highlight we proudly acknowledge is the Board's approval of the slate of applicants in the inaugural cycle of the ICANN grant program. This initiative was designed to foster creative and innovative solutions that further ICANN's vision of a single, open, and globally interoperable Internet.

We are excited and inspired by the successful applications, applicants, and look forward to the publication of those chosen once the contracting has finalized. Working more effectively and efficiently together is also important when it comes to how ICANN sustains itself financially. Last fiscal year, the organization encountered higher costs than usual, and took action to reduce its ongoing expenses. These actions have allowed us to reduce costs well below last year, and even below the current year budget.

In addition, funding remains steady, also above current year budget, and after seven months in the current fiscal year, ICANN operations are predicted to generate a small excess by the end of this current fiscal year. In addition, ICANN's long-term financial sustainability continues to strengthen, thanks to our reserve fund continuing to exceed its required minimum. As a result, ICANN operates with a demonstrated strong fiscal responsibility while continuing to deliver current programs timely and effectively.

As we start this meeting together, whether you are here virtually or in person, I look forward to hearing your different views and opinions, and I encourage you all to participate actively in this community forum. ICANN has a unique and critical role in the Internet ecosystem. Our success depends on this community. It needs your participation, your expertise, your willingness to engage in sometimes difficult yet necessary discussions. Every voice here strengthens not only ICANN, but the multistakeholder model, which is essential for the future of the Internet. I look forward to working with all of you as we continue to build a stable, secure and globally connected Internet. And now, it is my pleasure to welcome ICANN Board Chair, Tripta Sinha, to the stage. Thank you.

TRIPTI SINHA

Good morning, your Excellencies, esteemed colleagues and friends. A special welcome to those who are joining us remotely. We thank you for your participation, especially to those in time zones that make attending this meeting a challenge. Welcome to

ICANN82 in the vibrant city of Seattle. Known as the Emerald City, Seattle boasts a thriving creative and tech ecosystem, and we are delighted to bring ICANN's Community Forum to this innovative city.

It is inspiring to see so many familiar faces and new friends gathered here, united by our shared commitment to a single, global, secure, stable, interoperable and open Internet. We appreciate your engagement and contributions immensely. I would like to start my remarks by taking note of the year 2025, a year which we can all confidently predict will be remembered as being one that will mark significant ICANN and world events. Allow me to enumerate some notables.

In 2025, for ICANN, we started the year with Kurtis Lindquist as our new CEO. As you just heard from him, he has spent the last few weeks assessing the landscape and understanding ICANN's current state. We look forward to his personal vision and leadership and lend our full support in how ICANN will move forward with him at the helm.

In 2025, as Kurtis just noted, the New gTLD program made steady progress with the launch of the Applicant Support Program and the Registry Service Provider Evaluation Program, which are key steps in opening the next round. In January, the Board approved the slate of applicants in the inaugural cycle of the ICANN Grant Program. These are important milestones and would not be possible without collaboration between the community and ICANN.

In 2025, ICANN marks the 10th anniversary of the Universal Acceptance Steering Group. The Board thanks the entire ICANN community for their efforts to promote the implementation of a multilingual Internet. Your involvement recognizes the need for a UA-ready world where all valid domain names and email addresses work seamlessly regardless of length, language, or script. We continue to make progress in achieving that state.

In 2025, ICANN marks the culmination of the FY2630 ICANN Strategic Plan, our 2030 vision. Strategic plans are crucial as they provide a clear vision and direction for long-term success. By aligning objectives with operational capabilities and ecosystem needs, strategic planning enables ICANN to anticipate and prepare for future challenges and opportunities. It facilitates internal alignment, enhances decision-making, and improves resource allocation, allowing ICANN to stay proactive rather than reactive.

Our plan's four objectives focus on evolving and promoting ICANN's multi-stakeholder model to sustain its inclusive approach to Internet Governance, to develop policies and standards with input from multiple voices and interests, enhancing organizational excellence to foster a culture of Continuous Improvement, allowing ICANN to effectively meet evolving community and staff needs, collaborating with stakeholders as new technologies emerge to ensure the functionality and accessibility of the unique identifier systems, and finally, strengthening the stability and security of the Internet's unique identifier systems.

The creation of this plan was led by the ICANN Board, as it is one of our key responsibilities, but you and ICANN organization contributed towards it, and for that, the Board is very appreciative. We collectively own this plan. Now let's implement it together. In 2025, the world comes together to make critical decisions about Internet governance. We are reminded of the transformative role that the Internet has played in the world.

Let us not forget that multiple stakeholders, which include academia, technical communities, governments, businesses, civil society, and end users have all had a voice in shaping the Internet, its technologies, its policies, and its rules. And looking back, without a shadow of doubt, it has served humankind well as a modern-age global change agent. The Internet could not have been created without academia conducting original studies and investigations to expand the body of knowledge.

Similarly, we cannot technically advance the Internet without the technical community. We cannot make Internet-related public policy without governments. We cannot create new economies and industries without businesses. We cannot design features without input from end users. And we cannot be without advocacy for user rights and sundry issues from civil society.

In other words, all stakeholders play a significant role in shaping, evolving, and sustaining the Internet. Its governance needs a voice from each of us. In the past few months, the WSIS+20 modalities review co-facilitators have been appointed and a zero draft of the modalities was shared in ICANN's WSIS+20 outreach network.

Diplomats of the United Nations are discussing them as we speak. We're hopeful that the UN will resolve to include multi-stakeholder participation from the WSIS into the WSIS+20 review. We must collectively seize this opportunity to strengthen our commitment to enshrining the principles of full and authentic multi-stakeholder engagement in the governance of the Internet.

In 2025, the world order as we know it is changing and we bear witness to a global realignment. Our understanding of how the world works mutates. The well-known stoic philosophy of the dichotomy of controlled states, that we can control our own actions and reactions and there are events which are external to us and beyond our control. Applying this tenet to our environment, I suggest we focus constructively on what we can control and for what we cannot control, we might be able to influence by being models and exemplars.

I believe that in the midst of these unique times, there are three things that the human spirit yearns for, stability, security and unity. Contained in our mission statement are these very words. I encourage strict fidelity to our purpose by each of us doing our part in ensuring the stable and secure operation of the Internet's unique identifier systems. And while the world order pivots to a new normal, ICANN must be relied on and as an institution of stability and reliability, that ensures that it delivers effectively and with discipline.

By delivering together as a multi-stakeholder community, let us be an exemplar of dogged dedication and resilience during

unpredictable times to a mission that strives to preserve one world, one Internet. I am an optimist by nature, so I would like to close on a positive and hopeful note with a sense of levity and with a touch of the whimsical. Indulge me while I hearken back to my opening remarks when I welcomed you to Seattle, also known as the Emerald City. To borrow from the Wizard of Oz and to apply that metaphor in the ICANN context, I encourage you to follow the yellow brick road and stay the course with rigor and discipline.

Our journey to the Emerald City will be riddled with challenges, lions and tigers and bears, oh my. Let's weather these storms, tornadoes together and trust that we will soon be somewhere over the rainbow. Friends, on behalf of the ICANN Board, again, welcome to ICANN82, have a great meeting, persist and persevere, enjoy the coffee and engage with each other respectfully. Thank you. I now invite Hans Peter Hollen, the Chair of the ASO, for his remarks.

HANS PETTER HOLEN

Thank you very much, Tripti. Dear friends of the Internet, I'm here as Chair of the ASO or the NRO Executive Council to talk about the second N in ICANN. We're kind of the invisible part of the Internet. You only see the names in your browsers, but behind that there are numbers. So, the NRO is founded in 2003, so while that is after ICANN was founded, the RIRs that founded it actually predates ICANN, so the RIPE NCC, which I'm the CEO of, goes back to 1992. And that really made me feel old on Friday when I was asked to not only introduce myself in the meeting, but also state my ICANN age.

So, I was elected to the ASO AC back then as a community representative in 1999, so, yeah, 25 years. But since my work in numbers predates that, yeah, I'm becoming a dinosaur. So, we're tasked with distributing numbers. So, we have the IPv4 addresses, and there were a lot of those, and while they have been depleted, we have handed out all, and there are, of course, a need to keep the registries up to date. We have the brand new, which is 20-plus years old, IPv6 protocol, and there are still more than enough numbers for that.

So, the interesting part here is that not only do we register numbers, but we need to encourage our members, our community, to migrate to the next generation, and while it's a slow move, we're maybe at 40, 50% now, there are good signs of this accelerating. And this is really important for the growth of the Internet into the future. So, everybody can be connected. I mentioned the regional Internet registry. We have five of them. We have ARIN here in North America. We have LACNIC. We have RIPE NCC.

We have APNIC and AFRINIC, and each of us are not-for-profit membership organizations that organize our community in a bottom-up process, and you see the policy processes for number distribution happening in the regions, not here at ICANN. But it's very important for us to actually come here and work with people, because ICANN plays a very crucial role in the approval of global policies, how we work together, how the IANA distributes numbers to the regional Internet registries.

We are then five of us, and the importance here is the bottom-up and community engagement, right? There are 1,000 people in this room now. We have five times two meetings a year with not quite that many, but it's really a lot of people getting together, mainly engineers, but also businesses, governments, and others participating in these processes. We serve as the address supporting organization in ICANN, which means that we are a part of the ICANN ecosystem in order to make sure that names and numbers come together to make the Internet work.

The work of the NRO goes a bit outside ICANN as well. It's the coordinating vehicle on how we work together, because not everything is about global policy. It's also about transferring resources between the RIRs and really working together. A lot of what we're doing, you can see as technical, getting interoperability, but it is really about bringing people together. I think that the work of the NRO I did point back to 1999, and one of the things that happened shortly after ICANN was formed, was a process to set up a new RIRs, because at the time we only had three, and then we established a process to establish new RIRs, AFRINIC and LACNIC were the ones formed then, and this process is now something that we have looked at and figured out that after 25 years, this requires some updates.

So, that's one of the most important things that we're working on, and that, by coincidence, comes in the same year as Internet governance in general. Tripti talked about the future of the IGF and the process in WSIS+20, and these are in many ways two things that go hand in hand. The internal processes for not only creation of

new RIRs, but the standards we need to operate to, the maintaining of the services of an RIR is really important, and it's really important to us as a community that we demonstrate to the rest of the world that we are constantly improving this.

So, our role as a technical community is a very special one in Internet governance. There has been a lot of talk about the Internet, the technical community needs a role around the table in Internet Governance. I think we need a special role around the table when it comes to Internet Governance, because if we're not heard, there will be discussions and decisions made that may not be technically feasible. So, it's not only important that we're there, it's important that we are there and give good advice.

Strengthening the registry system, it's not a revolution in setting new standards or new requirements, it's about looking at the continued commitments of the RIRs. We have a process ongoing now for reviewing this. If you're interested, you can have a look at our webpages. We have a timeline now. Our community members, the Address Council, hosted the principles last year. We have had a survey, gathered input from that, analyzed that, and is now working on the first draft that will be reviewed during these days here, and we intend to publish at the end of May so that we can discuss that over the summer on webinars, but also as the ICANN meetings, ICANN83 in the summer and ICANN84 in the autumn.

So, if you're interested in the governance of the RIR system, please have a look at this and participate and give input to the draft as they come. And then I welcome you all to participate in our

meetings, and the next ones up are ARIN in North Carolina in April, then comes LACNIC and RIPE in May, and then you can round it up with IPNIC in the early autumn in Vietnam. So, thank you all for allowing me to share what we're doing on stage here, and looking forward to a great week.

NAELA SARRAS

Thank you, Kurtis, Tripti, and Hans. Next, we have Kim Davies, Vice President of IANA and President of PTI to talk about an ICANN function that you might not be familiar with.

KIM DAVIES

Good morning, everyone. As you may know, the time zone here in Seattle changed early morning yesterday. Standard time here is eight hours behind UTC, which is the global reference time. But on Sunday, the USA sprung forward into daylight saving time, moving one hour ahead. I imagine for most of you, your phones and computers automatically switch to the new time without you needing to lift a finger. You'll recognize those who didn't, they'll be the ones arriving here an hour late.

The fact that the time zone change for you is so seamless is a testament to one of the many functions ICANN performs that you may not be aware of. In our IANA team, one of the databases we maintain contains a comprehensive record of all the world's time zones. Both current and historical, with precise mathematical rules for when time shifts for purposes like daylight savings time.

The database is used by practically everyone, whether you know it or not. It is in every major operating system, programming language, calendaring application, the list goes on. Its usages range from those who are simply planning an online meeting, all the way to schedulers at airlines. Generally, you don't need to know it's even there. Software vendors retrieve updates directly from IANA and disseminate it to their customers. Using this data, clocks will just change automatically at just the right moment.

Next time you install a software update on your phone or computer, you're likely getting the latest time zone data. For example, Paraguay recently changed its time zone policy to cease observing daylight saving time and permanently adhere to the same time year-round. If you're in Paraguay or scheduling a meeting in Paraguay, you will need to have the latest edition of IANA's data installed before the last Sunday of this month to continue seeing the correct time.

In fact, I looked at my phone yesterday and saw this message indicating that the refreshed IANA data would be available next time I restarted my phone. Now, much like the rest of ICANN, the data on time zones relies on the dedication of volunteers. IANA is not the global authority that sets time zones. Rather, we are informed by a community of government regulators, academics, and other enthusiasts who make contributions to help refine our data and make sure that it is as accurate as possible. There are often passionate discussions in our forum about the right way to

encode the peculiarities of some of the time zones around the world.

One thing I do want to draw your attention to is that we do depend on governments to make decisions regarding changing time zone policy with plenty of advance notice. To distribute the latest time zone data often takes months, if not a year or more. Sometimes we see decisions made with little or no lead time, which then causes confusion in the country when those changes don't magically happen, as we've all come to expect. I'd encourage those of you who are in a position to advise governments to recommend any changes to time zone policy be made with at least one year lead time.

As we meet this week, much of the discussion will concern domain names. But ICANN's mission is much more than that. It is the global coordination of unique identifiers around the world to ensure that the internet works seamlessly. The time zone database is just one of thousands of different kinds of coordination that ICANN, through the IANA functions, performs so that at the end of the day, things just work online.

We've all made time zone adjustments to be here this week. Maybe you traveled a great distance from your home to be here. If you're joining us online, you probably needed to know when 9 a.m. in Seattle is for you. Or maybe you were already in Seattle yesterday when we shifted to daylight savings time. Assuming I'm right, your mobile phone has the correct time, your travel itinerary, your

boarding pass had the correct time to board your flight, all the appointments in your calendar are now up to date.

It's useful to reflect that this outcome is an example of the quiet coordination that happens within the ICANN community to make sure things work seamlessly. I hope you have a wonderful conference week and I look forward to seeing you around. And with that, I'll hand you back to my colleague, Naela.

NAELA SARRAS

Thank you, Kim. Next, and for the Community Excellence Award, I'd like to invite the community selection panel, in addition to Tripti Sinha and Kurtis Lindquist, to come to the stage to present the award and congratulate the recipient.

JUDITH HELLERSTEIN

Wow, I've never stood in front of the whole stage like this. Anyway, good morning, everyone. My name is Judith Hellerstein and I have the great honor and privilege of representing the 2025 ICANN Community Excellence Award selection panel.

On behalf of the ICANN community, it is my great pleasure and privilege to formally announce the recipient of this year's ICANN Community Excellence Award. The prestigious award recognizes ICANN community members who have dedicated countless volunteer hours to finding consensus-driven solutions and contributing meaningfully to ICANN's multi-stakeholder model of

internet governance. The award, first established in 2014, marks the 12th time of this distinguished recognition.

What makes this award truly meaningful is that it's given by the ICANN community, for the ICANN community. Candidates are carefully evaluated by a panel of community members appointed by At-Large, the ccNSO, GNSO, GAC, RSSAC, and SSAC communities, using a regular set of criteria. I'd like to extend my sincere thanks to my fellow panelists standing behind me and also watching online for their time and dedication to selecting this year's recipient.

The panel met four times from January to February 2025 and carefully reviewed and evaluated all candidates and nomination statements. After much consideration, we are proud to present this year's ICANN Community Excellence Award to our esteemed friend and colleague, Stephen Deerhake. Stephen's longstanding commitment to ICANN's multi-stakeholder model, his pivotal role in the ICANN stewardship transition process, and his leadership in the Empower community are just some of the areas that made his application stand out and led to his award.

His dedication to the ccNSO, where he has served since 2015, is recognized as well. Stephen continues to serve as an elected member of the ccNSO Council for the North American region, consistently demonstrating leadership and expertise. His involvement in ICANN Tech Day since its inception also further highlights his technical contributions to the ICANN community.

Stephen has also played an integral role in shaping policies within the ccNSO. He chaired two very key ccNSO policy dialogue process Working Groups. His leadership and ability to reach consensus has been instrumental in running these two-policy development working groups. Beyond this policy work, Stephen has also contributed to the ICANN Community Excellence Awards himself. He served on the selection panel, just like I did, but he did it in 2019, 2020, and 2021. And he even announced the awards recipient at ICANN65 in Marrakesh, just as I am doing now.

Today, it is our honor to recognize his outstanding contributions. Stephen's commitment to collaboration, his leadership and working groups, and his ability to work across culture and backgrounds embody the very essence of this award. Please join me in celebrating Stephen Deerhake, the 2025 ICANN Community Excellence Award recipient.

STEPHEN DEERHAKE

I don't want to break it. I'm old school, I like paper. So, wow. Good morning, everybody. I never thought I would receive this, so I'm pretty stunned. But I thank everyone on the selection committee and those who you might, whoever you are, who did the nomination. When Kurtis called me, I was really shocked. Anyway, before I share a few thoughts about ICANN, I want to take a moment to recognize our day-to-day, the people who make our day-to-day work possible. And that's our Secretariat staff.

For me, obviously, it's the ccNSO Secretariat, both past and present, who ensure we function smoothly and effectively in our

meetings, both in person and remotely. And those of you in other groups, you know your own Secretariats are just as vital, so please cherish them, treat them with respect, and thank them every chance you get. We would not be here without their tireless support.

I also want to encourage each of you to seek out and thank the behind-the-scenes technical teams, the ones you see tucked away in the back of the room or in the side of the room, who handle our technology needs. They make it possible for us to collaborate, not only in person, but also remotely at all hours of the day and night. For participants spanning the globe, let's be sure to express our gratitude for their indispensable work as well.

Now, let me talk about ICANN for a second. Yes, it's in its mid-20s, but it remains fragile. For many governments, it's an unsettling that a global resource like the Internet is governed by the people in this room rather than by governments themselves. And perhaps it should be. We, the global community, are the stewards of this incredible creation, which is a remarkable concept worth protecting. Remember, sometimes the only way to prove your strength is to yield.

My generation is starting to wind down our involvement with ICANN. After dedicating more than 25 years to ICANN, I've said goodbye to some cherished colleagues along the way. That's the nature of life and progress. Now, it's up to all of you, and especially the next generation of Internet leaders, many of whom I've had the

privilege of mentoring to carry the torch forward, protect and preserve ICANN for the future.

Once again, thank you for this truly humbling honor. It means more to me than I can express. I do want to give out one specific thank you, and that's to my daughter's story. I want to thank her for her support and love over the years. Tomorrow is her 25th birthday. I got her okay to come here. So, thank you and keep this extraordinary community running.

NAELA SARRAS

Congratulations, Stephen. To close the ceremony and to march us into ICANN82, let me introduce the cultural performance provided by the Seattle Seahawks, Blue Thunder. The Seattle Seahawks is a team in the U.S. National Football Conference. Blue Thunder is the official drum line of the Seattle Seahawks, providing energetic performances that showcase different styles of music and choreography. Enjoy the show. And after the coffee break, I hope to see you back here in this room for the next session on how we meet community feedback. Thank you, everyone, for being here today.

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