
ICANN84 | AGM – Roadmap Towards UA Adoption
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SEDA AKBULUT

Hello and welcome to Roadmap Towards UA Adoption session. My name is Seda Akbulut and I am a participation manager for this session. Please note that this session is being recorded and is governed by the ICANN Community Participant Code of Conduct, ICANN Expected Standards of Behavior, and the ICANN Community Anti-Harassment Policy.

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SARMAD HUSSAIN

Thank you, Seda, and welcome everyone to this session on the Roadmap Towards Universal Acceptance Adoption. Before we get started with the panel, I would like to ask if there are any newcomers here in this session. If so, please raise your hand. Excellent. Please, we are welcome to the session. This session is basically focused on looking at universal acceptance of all domain

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names and email addresses, which means domain names from using the new generic top-level domains, but also domain names and email addresses in local languages.

And we actually have a panel of speakers who will take us through this session. I'm happy to introduce the panel. We'll start with Maarten Botterman, who's the Chair of ICANN Board's Internationalized Domain Name and Universal Acceptance Working Group. He's going to be talking about guiding ICANN org's work on universal acceptance adoption.

We have Edmon Chung, who's chairing the Universal Acceptance Expert Working Group, which has been recently formed. And he will share the progress of that working group.

We have Sean Bedford from Meta. Meta's been working on updating their applications and systems to make them UA-ready. And Sean will share updates on the work and the effort, which obviously goes behind the scenes for that purpose.

We also have Tarja Turtia, who comes from UNESCO. UNESCO has been focusing on universal acceptance as well in collaboration with ICANN. And she is going to be sharing some of the efforts which are ongoing at UNESCO. And at the end, I will also share some of the updates from ICANN org.

So with that introduction of the panel, let's move forward. Please feel free to ask any questions, raise hand, and we'll take some questions after each of the panelists. And then we'll hopefully have

some time for questions and answers at the end of the session as well. So with that, let me hand it over to Maarten. Maarten, please.

MAARTEN BOTTERMAN

Thank you so much. And thank you all for coming here, demonstrating your interest in a very important part of the future of the Internet. That's universal acceptance of also domain names of languages that go beyond the original set with which we started the Internet some years ago.

And I would like to take you back to the beginning. Well, in 2015, we really started to take this seriously. Before that, I was with the first round or the previous round of new TLDs. That was where IDNs were introduced as an opportunity in 2012. And I was with PIR for full disclosure. We did bid for a number of IDNs. At that time, not because we thought this was the commercial right thing to do, but because we thought this would serve the people that we wanted to serve. And a lot needed to happen since, because if you would have an IDN website, that didn't mean it would resolve or would be readable.

In 2015, also based on community initiative and interaction with staff, the Universal Acceptance Steering Group was set up and met for the first time in ICANN52 in Singapore. Got the commitment from ICANN at that time promised by Dr. Steve Crocker, I think, in person on behalf of ICANN to support UASG in her work to raise awareness on universal acceptance for a 10-year period. And I see in the room some people who have been actively contributing to

that with deep gratitude. And one of them is the previous Board working group chair, Edmon Chung, on my right side.

So what this working group did was start to publicize versions of documents that helped develop a better understanding of what standards to adhere to, how to roll this out. And ultimately, over time, rightly so, it led also to initiatives with local people, because these are the ones who care most, not those people who always gather in the meeting rooms, but the people on the ground. I think UA Days is something that most of you will have witnessed at least once, if not more times. That started in 2023, and that was really to also invite and support UA activists around the world to come out with the word and to raise local awareness. As Dutchmen, even in the Netherlands, I can testify we had a UA Day, recognizing that even for those countries that normally have Latin script as their main script, also benefit from acceptance of also IDNs and other names.

Next to the continuous need to improve the internet in its resolving, other than the traditional domain names. So that brought us to 2025, where we realized that we were, after 10 years of focus on awareness raising on the issue of universal acceptance, focus on awareness raising of the value of IDNs, it is time to start shifting to implementation, to really making things work. And with that, we approved in March 2025 a resolution where we explicitly recognized and applauded all the work by all those involved in making UA work, in making IDNs work, in generating the root zone

generation tables. And in particular, also the universal acceptance steering group that had been so much pioneering this.

We were able, thanks to the team, to capture that in a report, that report is still available also on the website. I have the honor and pleasure of even having a printed copy from this, there are a few, but it's really worth looking into, because it helps you also better understand how we got to where we are today. And at that moment, we asked the ICANN president and CEO to move towards progressing this in the best possible way, in terms of implementation, and very much aligning it with the strategic plan.

For those who don't know me, I've also been involved in the Board to develop this strategic plan as one of the two co-chairs, together with my colleague Chris Chapman, vice chair of the Board. And in interaction with the community that led to the 2630 strategic plan. If you haven't read it yet, and you're intending to stay involved in ICANN, go there, read it. It's truly worthwhile, it's the product of interaction between community, organization, and Board, and it does highlight our priorities for the coming years to come. One of those is to facilitate digital inclusion, explicitly recognized, also to promote the advancement of UA and IDNs, and to proactively collaborate with relevant external parties. Right side, UNESCO, on the left side, the industry beyond ICANN, to promote, to make this possible.

So, improving ICANN Org's own systems in UA readiness is one of those priorities there, and we've been working on, I think you'll say

more about that later. And also the growth in the number of ICANN accredited registrars and registries that are UA ready. This doesn't capture the ccTLDs, which are not registries contracted by ICANN, that are only the gTLDs, as you know. But also in CC world, we see a lot of interest and the fast tracking to support CCs who want to move forward there.

And last but not least, it's just like if you ask a younger person, what is the internet? This is the internet. We know there's more behind it. There's also more behind the website and the web address and the email address. It's also software that needs to be able to deal with it. So, that is a crucial element. So, this we saw already. Did we see this? Okay, no, we didn't see this yet.

So following the ICANN Board's ask to the CEO to pick this up, the ICANN CEO posted the blog to noting the shift to start inviting people to volunteer for the Universal Acceptance Expert Group. And in June, we celebrated this, as I said, at ICANN83. And on August 25, the expert group was formed. I see several members in this room. And thank you for your willingness to serve and to continue to serve. Mind you, these people are committed to the work so much that they are participating for once a week, almost.

And what you saw on the slide of speakers, Edmon Chung is one of the co-chairs. The other co-chair sitting next to him is Sarmad himself. So with that, it's been a real pleasure to work with this team and help with the transition. And I really look forward to what

the future will bring for UA. And by the way, I think this is an acceleration we'll all benefit from. Back to you, Sarmad.

SARMAD HUSSAIN

Thank you, Maarten. So let's see, are there any questions at this time? Anything online?

SEDA AKBULUT

I think it's done.

SARMAD HUSSAIN

So then let's move on to our next speaker, Edmon Chung. As Maarten shared, as we move towards UA adoption, the ICANN organization has set up a universal acceptance expert working group. This expert working group brings in experts on UA from an internationalization and multilingual internet from across the globe. Edmon Chung is one of the co-chairs and I will request him to share some of the updates of this working group. Thank you. Edmon, over to you.

EDMON CHUNG

Thank you, Sarmad. And those of you who know me know that I'm always excited to talk about IDNs and UA. And very honored to be helping chair this UA expert working group that really, as Maarten was saying, takes the work from the community, including the UASG, further and deepen those work and operationalize it really with the ICANN team, the ICANN Org staff and team.

So I wanted to start by noting that that is an important scope of the group. So, yes, of course, our outputs will be relevant to the community, but it is very focused on getting Sarmad's team. What are the focus? What are the priorities that ICANN should work on in the next few years to deepen the work that has been started by the community and built up through the years, especially through the UASG? I just want to highlight that this also aligns with ICANN's strategic plan, as Maarten mentioned. And if you go back to, not necessarily we need to go back to the slide now, but if you remember, the foundation is about facilitating digital inclusion.

So, UA is a method, a means, having multilingual domain names and email addresses is the technology, but the fundamental goal, the strategic directive is to facilitate digital inclusion. And that's what the UA work is about. And also, as Maarten mentioned, actually, since August, when the group was put together, we have been meeting weekly. In fact, Sarmad and I and Seda and the ICANN team were meeting one more time every week. So, we're actually having two meetings per week to try to meet a rather ambitious timeline, which is August to March. Those of you who know PDPs and working groups in ICANN know that this is a very aggressive kind of timeline.

But I did want to report that I think we are on schedule so far, at least. And the group that is put together, very much thanks to the community sending people in, but also Sarmad's work in pulling in people from big tech, from academia, from UNESCO and the international organizations, such that it kind of enriches the

discussion that we were able to have. The members in the group come from not only the immediate community, but has this external help, which has proven to be very useful, in fact. And that's one of the reasons why we were able to push through the timeline as well.

Before I go to some of the highlights of the discussion so far, I did want to highlight about the timeline itself. So as you can kind of see, it's designed to end around March. So it's also around the time of the Mumbai ICANN meeting. We are looking to have a preliminary draft that will come out before the Mumbai meeting. And so, therefore, people could provide comments and public comments into it, which we will potentially further engage the community in Mumbai as we finalize the report by March of 2026. So, that's in terms of the timeline and the idea there.

As a quick preview, especially Sarhad and I, but also part of the group that is convened, worked through a charter document that identified 10 areas that we would be focusing on to. It includes how we reach big tech organizations, open source communities, software developers, system administrators, and, of course, the DNS industry, including the gTLDs and ccTLDs. But also broader to governments, the public sector, intergovernmental organizations, and academia. So, at this point, we've actually went through the first 5 of the 10 scoped out ones, including big tech and open source communities and so on.

I can just highlight a couple really interesting development is how we approach big tech. For example, the views of having a full tech stack in all the layers of the tech through the company and also having different materials focused for the CEOs of the management, the technical part, because their interests might be very different. One might be on more of the economic value. One might be more on the technical know-how. And then also identified the corporate social responsibility aspects of things as well.

There are CSR materials that would appeal to big corporations. CSR, corporate social responsibility units, might be very different. And that has been really interesting and important. For example, open source, we identified a horizontal view and a vertical view. Libraries that would be used in different platforms, but also platforms such as WordPress and so on. That is really important.

So this is the kinds of things that we're looking at. And, of course, the next we will come to the ICANN registries and registrars, because we better drink our own Kool-Aid and do it really well. And that's going to be a good part of the recommendations as well.

So we are looking to complete, as I said, the preliminary report by hopefully February, so that we can publish something before Mumbai and to get everyone's feedback through the public comments. That's not on here, but something came to mind. We're also looking at how to measure. We will also look at the priorities and how do we measure, what are the right measures that maybe

international organizations can help us with in collecting data to measure the progress of UA as well.

So with that, hopefully that's a good update or reporting back to the group and see if there are any questions. Mark, please.

SARMAD HUSSAIN

Mark, please.

MARK DATYSGELD

Thank you. Mark Datysgeld, former UASG ambassador. Thank you for the explanation, Edmon. It makes much clearer the work of the group. One question that I have is this GitHub repo, is it meant for us to be able to see transparently what the work is doing, or can we as community also contribute to the discussions? What is the ultimate goal of it?

SARMAD HUSSAIN

Right. So basically, there is a community space as well as the GitHub repo. These are spaces for the expert working group to have ongoing discussions to finalize the recommendations. The community will have, I guess, when we release this for public comment at that time, I think that would be a good time for the community to provide further input for the working group. Thank you. Yes, please. There's another question in the room.

SADICHCHHA SILWAL

Hello, it's me, Sadichchha Silwal from Nepal. For the record, I'm with the NextGen program. What can non-technical stakeholders can do to contribute to the UA movement in the long term?

EDMON CHUNG

Yep. So, I'm happy to answer that. And I'm reporting back from the group, so I didn't touch so much on that. But I think non-technical users are very important for the push. Right now, I believe one of the big issues with universal acceptance and IDNs is it has a market failure. It means that the end users or people who want to use it doesn't even know it could be used. And when they try to use it, it fails in some cases, and therefore, they lose trust.

So there are two main things in my mind that end users who are not technical can do. One is to tell your providers, I want my email address in my own language. That will prompt them. Because technical support, if they don't-- oh, nobody's asking for this. And the tech team in the company won't prioritize this ad. Nobody wants it. So, every ask, and when you use your IDN or your long TLD domain and it doesn't work, remember to file a complaint or file issues with the company. Don't just go back and use your gmail.com. Insist that, hey, we have a problem here. Can you fix it?

And the other main thing is I believe this needs to be a movement. I see this. I emphasize the digital inclusion part of it. I think this is not just a market-driven thing. It's about language justice. In my mind, that's what people need to come together to push for as a campaign, not only just for technology. It's about language justice

because having the different languages in the world be able to use for navigation on the Internet is, I believe, right. And that's what non-technical users can also do.

SARMAD HUSSAIN

Thank you, Edmon. We have two hands up as well. In the interest of time, we'll close the queue there for now. And after that, we'll move on to the next speaker. But let's take these two questions. The first one, Oloyede, are you in the room or online? Please, can you ask your question?

ABDULKARIM AYOPO OLOYEDE

Thank you very much, Sarmad. Thank you, Edmon. Looking at the chat, you're talking about strategies for UA adoption. And I know ICANN has been doing some things with academia, especially when it comes to the issue of the curriculum. So I just wanted to find out what is the update on that and what has been the uptake on that aspect?

SARMAD HUSSAIN

So I guess I can take this question. So Abdulkarim, this is Sarmad. There is an active program at ICANN where we are working with universities to integrate IDN and UA concepts into their technical curriculum. And the motivation behind that is that that kind of integration makes a sustainable mechanism to train people rather than just doing one-off kind of training. And if you have interest or if anybody else has interest on it, we'll talk a little bit more about it

in the last presentation. But please get in touch with us at uaprogram@icann.org, and we'll share more details. Satish, please.

SATISH BABU

Thanks, Sarmad. Satish, for the record. So we have moved on from a completely open model to an expert group model, which I suppose is fine after 10 years. At the time of formulation of this new model, there was this talk of the remaining AC/SOs. Instead of individuals contributing directly, the AC/SOs could contribute to some of the programs that this new group is going to propose. So do you have any such plans, and what would be the role of other ACs and SOs in this?

SARMAD HUSSAIN

Thank you, Satish. This is Sarmad. So we already have representation from the different SOs and ACs in this expert working group. As you know, in addition to the experts from outside the ICANN community, we also invited a nominee each from all the SOs and ACs. And many of those, not all of them, but some of those SOs/ACs also have their internal working groups, which are working. So, for example, we have the UA committee of ccNSO, and the nominee from the ccNSO obviously would liaise internally with that SO.

We also have a nominee from GAC, also a nominee from SSAC, and ALAC as well. So we have those nominees. Many of the SOs, ACs

have their own internal working groups as well. And I guess the intention is that those discussions which are happening within those working groups, they can actually get through those nominees into the expert working group discussions as well, and vice versa that some of those discussions in the expert working group, we'll eventually go back to the respective SOs and ACs. So there is that channel which is in place. Of course, it's up to those nominees to make sure that those discussions are--

In addition to that, we also have some of the at least two programs which are continuing. As you know, we've already announced the UA Day. We'll talk a little more about it later as well. And we also continue to work with UA local initiatives at the local level. So there are different efforts which are ongoing. Thank you.

So in the interest of time, let's keep moving on and we'll keep taking questions. Let me invite Sean Bedford, who's a distinguished business engineer at Meta, to talk about some of the exciting work which is going on at Meta, vis-a-vis making Meta's applications and products universal acceptance ready. So Sean, please.

SEAN BEDFORD

Thank you, Sarmad. Hi, everyone. I'm Sean. I work at Meta as a distinguished business engineer. I'm also on the UA Expert Working Group that we've just been talking about. If any of you were at ICANN82 in Seattle, you'll have seen a version of this talk. I've actually intentionally not changed the slides because I wanted to

show progress. So there are a couple of places we have managed to move some things. So I'll highlight those as we talk. Let's just see if this clicker will do its thing.

So I'll start off with why does Meta care about any of this? Why is Meta talking about universal acceptance? So really, if you think about Meta, Meta's core mission, this is our core mission statement as a company, which is to build the future of human connection and the technology that makes it possible. We have a little bit over 3.4 billion people using our products and services every month. Obviously, not every single one of those 3.4 billion people speaks English.

So meeting people where they are, and that is the people using our services, the businesses using our services, and the infrastructure behind that's powering all of those services, it really needs to be catering to those people where they are. That means that universal acceptance, even though we don't call it that, is critically important to what we do at Meta.

So we embarked on this journey with ICANN probably 18 months ago at this point. This initiated from some connections from Sarmad through to us. It actually came to me through some work I do and maintain as the public suffix list representative at Meta. So that's how this all started. And we have made some good progress on things over time. I will talk about progress. I will actually start by talking about why is this a hard problem to solve. Throughout these slides, you'll see any text in bold is things that have changed

since January. It's notable that nothing on this slide is bold. We have all of the same challenges that we had a year ago, two years ago, five years ago.

So the first challenge that Meta faces is that our apps are really, really complicated. The way that we divide and conquer work within the company is split up across different product teams and different product organizations. So this screenshot, which is a relatively simple screenshot of just the Facebook app home screen, that's several teams owning that. When I did this talk in Seattle, it was 17 teams. Now we've had a few reorgs, and this is actually now 27 teams.

So there's one team that owns the tab bar. There's another team that owns the search bar. There's another team that owns the status. There's another team that owns reels. There's another team that owns people you may know. And then there's another team that owns the content that exists if you start to scroll down. So that's one product manager, one software engineering manager, one product data scientist, and all of the teams working with those teams that you have to convince to make any changes. So making changes is organizationally challenging for large organizations. That's an example from Meta. Meta, I think, is relatively simple compared to maybe a more legacy company. So this is a hard problem to just convince people to solve it.

The second thing that we're often looking at within Meta is the user experience balance of this. When we start to add support for

ccTLDs, as is the case in this example with .it, that is a word in English, and obviously with preformed text, there is a chance that someone will mistype that and not leave a space. If we're not careful about how we balance that, we'll start to link, in this case, great.it, when the user's intention was probably not to link that at all. So thinking about that and thinking about the tradeoffs there and having a really deep understanding of the data and real-world usage is always the first step that we go through with any changes like this.

We actually ship support for a lot more ccTLDs at the beginning of this year. We're going through a similar journey at the moment for gTLDs. That is an even more complex problem because gTLDs are, by design, words almost always. So we're doing that analysis across our ecosystem right now. The final thing is the broad spectrum of IANA domains. There's a large list of domains in various languages there. It's actually quite hard for an independent small team to keep on top of all of those languages, regional nuances, translations, mistranslations, social context, and all of the other things that come with that. So keeping on top of that list and making decisions on what should or should not be included is not always the easiest thing to do either.

So as I said, none of those challenges have changed. These are all the same challenges we had. What I will call out is that the technology already exists for all of this, right? This is actually not a technical problem. It is a user experience and a people problem more often than not. So where are we today? We have some bold

on this slide, so some changes. Yay. So firstly, most ccTLDs now work on web. So across www.facebook.com, www.instagram.com, we now support most country code domains.

There are a couple of exceptions to that to balance out the user experience and what I call the false positive rate. So more often than not, where we see a domain being overly used, it means that someone has not left that space. So we don't linkify that by default unless you put www or HTTP in front of the string and then we will link that. So we think this drives a good balance for most use cases.

The second thing we've been working on, I did talk about this at ICANN82, we've been doing this same investigation into gTLDs. That's nearing completion. So I'm pretty hopeful. I'm going to say this. I'll probably regret it later. I'm pretty hopeful we can ship some support for gTLDs before the end of this year. So that will follow the same path as ccTLDs and will enable linkification for more gTLDs across [www.facebook](http://www.facebook.com) and www.instagram.com before the year's out.

Finally, we're participating as part of the UA Expert Working Group, as Edmon mentioned. Some of the learnings, Edmon stole my thunder a little bit earlier, but some of the things we've been talking about there around how do we start to tackle large organizations and really go into those organizations and the places where it's going to make a difference is a lot of the conversation we've been having there. Meta obviously has a lot of in-rows with academia and a lot of in-rows with open source communities as well. So

we're also providing some support and advice and guidance on how do we shape that conversation to get good outcomes and to really make some meaningful progress on UA.

What do I think could be better? So these are really the two key areas where I think there's room for improvement. Hopefully, some of this we can tackle through the Expert Working Group. I'll start there, actually. I'll start with widespread understanding of universal acceptance. So to most people outside ICANN, universal acceptance doesn't actually mean anything. It's a phrase that you use.

Funnily enough, a lot of the team I've been working with on solving Mandarin translation problems are Chinese. Almost all of the software engineers I'm working with are Chinese. I say to them, are you going to solve this universal acceptance issue? And they're like, what's that? I have no idea. But then I show them a website in Mandarin. And they go, oh yeah, that's broken. It's literally that simple. Showing rather than using this phrase universal acceptance makes a huge difference.

So I think broader understanding of that or the branding of UA or how it's presented to these external stakeholders is going to be really, really important. Beyond that, there's then a problem of, okay, now you understand what the problem is, do you actually have an incentive to do something about it? And for that, at least within big tech, the incentives for doing this universal acceptance work need to align with existing company goals or priorities.

So I'll give you another example here that I'm pushing on for facebook.com. Currently, you actually can't sign up to facebook.com with an internationalized email address. You have to use a Latin character set email address. So to the question earlier on how can non-technical users help? Exactly that. Please report it as a bug. Because the more data we have that tells us this is broken, the more likely it is that we're going to pay attention and fix it.

So that's one example of lining up incentives. We can put a dollar amount at Meta on how much is a new person worth having on the platform to us. That starts to drive the right outcomes and incentives internally for those many, many product managers and software engineering managers to start to prioritize this kind of work. So that's, I think, the simplest challenge to solve.

The other angle of this, though, is more cohesive mobile operating system and also to some extent web browser support. So the technology exists. Unicode is there. It exists. It works. What we don't have is consistent support for that across Safari, Chrome, Edge, Mozilla Firefox, iOS, and Android. That is very, very varied. We, along with many other companies, almost every company out there actually, relies on those underlying frameworks to make decisions about things that should be or should not be URLs or email addresses.

Usually it relies on some framework or library built into the operating system or web browser. And all we're doing is putting in

a string, a piece of text. We're saying, you know, www.website.gtld. And that library is going to return to us, yes, that's a URL. You should link that. Or no, that is not. You should not link that. And the same for email addresses. These libraries work in very different ways. And they're not in the slightest bit consistent.

I will note that we often don't see Google and Apple at these events. And those are the companies who have the most power to actually affect these changes on the ecosystem. They own those operating systems. They own the specifications, and they own the ability to change it. For mobile operating systems, this is especially hard because there's not really a forum for those things to happen. And those discussions don't really take place for either platform. Android is open source, so you can see it. iOS is closed source. You can't see any of the changes there.

In the web world, there is at least places you can go. W3C would be the obvious place to try and influence specifications. We're also discussing this as part of the expert working group. So I think this is the other area where we, as a group, need to be doing more work to try and push forward that boundary and highlight these gaps that exist today in everything that everyone uses to access the internet. My clicker is no longer working. I think this is my last slide. Yeah. Okay. So that was me. I'll hand back to Sarmad now.

SARMAD HUSSAIN

We can take maybe one question for Sean before we move on. Yes. So we have one in the room, but we also have one online. So we'll

take those two. Let's first go to online. Maria, please. And then we'll come back to you, Jiankang.

MARIA KOLESNIKOVA

Hello to everyone. I hope you can hear me.

SARMAD HUSSAIN

Yes, we can hear you.

MARIA KOLESNIKOVA

Thank you very much. I would like to ask Sean, if it's possible, could you please include in your presentations that you usually make on ICANN meetings the current number of languages that you support and in what places and probably in what kind of-- I mean, add some examples, how do you support these languages? I mean, only user interfaces, only languages to make posts or something like this. Anyway, this will be very useful to understand the current status of Meta products. Thank you very much.

SEAN BEDFORD

Yeah. Happy to. So I think in terms of what we're talking about, the scope of this discussion, this is mostly about our support for links and email address recognition. We actually do support most languages across most of the interface. So, Eastern European languages, which is I guess the angle you're coming from here, is pretty well supported across our platform in various places, for posting, for writing, for commenting, for reacting. This is more

specifically about leaving Meta's platform and going to somewhere else.

Again, if you see gaps, please report them as bugs. There's almost certainly a gap where the software engineer working on it does not speak the language that you are seeing an issue in. There's a very high chance that that's the case. I myself only speak English, right? So I'm working on this, but I only speak English. So unless someone tells me there's a problem, it's actually quite hard to resolve. This is definitely something I can look to do for the next round of these talks, though, is highlighting the places where we see this working well, but also the places where we still have gaps.

SARMAD HUSSAIN

Thank you, Sean. So Jiankang, but may I request that you keep it short if possible?

JIANKANG YAO

Okay, thank you. Firstly, I thank you for being the UA export group members because Meta is very important for UA. So Meta can be our best practice example of big technology companies. So the first, as I mentioned, you have mentioned three hard things. The third hard thing, maybe there's a misunderstanding because you said TLDs. I know TLDs, there's frequently updated. Actually, I think with one year, maybe never change. More than 1,000 TLDs, but seldom change. Only with new TLDs, new programs, there are

increases. So it is fixed, almost fixed. So I think that is another bigger problem.

So next is the suggestion. For example, you have mentioned a lot of difficulties. I think, for example, you can say that the company's strategy, UTF-8 or Unicode is the foundation for your company's products. So then in future, you can easily, step by step, update Meta's product to support UTF-8 Unicode. So step by step, that will be easy to solve the problem. If you have no such strategy, then you will have a hard problem because the different groups have different ideas. So first is the strategy.

The second, I like to suggest Meta to have open the EI address registration. So first, maybe you have some demo to allow users to test the EI account. But currently, because no big email service providers provide such service, so maybe Meta can help with something. The second suggestion, or third suggestion, is because when EI is used, because Meta or Facebook, so when you can use EI address as Meta or Facebook's account, currently only ask email address. In future, so you can use, for example, my name is Yao Jiankang, Chinese email address register Facebook. Thank you.

SEAN BEDFORD

I'll be very quick in my responses. So yeah, thank you for the feedback. I think on the IANA list, I agree, it doesn't change very often. The key is that when it does change, we need to go through this whole process again. Even one new addition to that list, we need to go through this whole process to decide, should we

support it, should we not support it? What does real world usage look like? If we don't have enough data yet, do we need to wait for people to see usage of it online across our platform before we add it?

There's a whole process there, which is it's going to lag by definition behind what you see in terms of registration of new websites or email domains. So that's really the main challenge there. It's just the laggy nature of this kind of work as it expands across the ecosystem. I will rephrase that slide, though, to make that clearer.

On your second two points, I think, yes, there is definitely scope and room for improvement. For the record, Meta is fully UTF compliant and Unicode compliant already. The problem is not at the foundational layer. The problem is a few layers up the stack from there in various places. I will take any and all feedback you've got. Let's catch up after on that. I think definitely on this email point, we'll chat about that after the talk today because I think that's one to dig into a bit more.

JIANKANG YAO

Thank you all very much.

SARMAD HUSSAIN

Thank you, Sean, and thank you, Jiankang. Let's move on. We are running a bit short on time, so we'll go through the presentations and then if we have time, we'll take any more questions at the end

of the session. Let me invite Tarja Turtia, who is the chief of the section for freedom of expression and safety of journalists at UNESCO to take us through some of the work UNESCO has been doing. Thank you.

TARJA TURTIA

Thank you, Sarmad, and thank you for inviting UNESCO here. We have been actually working quite intensively this year because we signed an MOU between UNESCO and ICANN in January. We have been working on linguistic diversity online. Basically, it all comes to what is UNESCO's take on this. It comes to the lack of multilingualism in cyberspace.

Already over 20 years ago, UNESCO's member states were very wise and forward-looking, adopting their recommendation concerning the promotion and use of multilingualism and universal access to cyberspace. This was adopted in 2003. It's a standard-setting instrument that is asking member states to take appropriate measures to promote the use of multilingualism in cyberspace. It also includes promoting partnerships in the management of multilingual domain names.

Also, UNESCO monitors this. We periodically send a survey to member states. Previously in this panel, there was a question how we can actually monitor this. We are monitoring and measuring what the member states are doing. We are going to do this survey

again next year. We will be working a little bit on the questionnaire to also include more on this aspect in there.

When you look at the languages, there are some 7,000 languages in the world. For example, in Africa, less than 2% of estimated 2,000 languages have a real presence online. We have a little bit of work to do. Some of the member states have done some innovative work in this area, especially in scientific and public domains to promote multilingualism. Just one example from our office in Nairobi, where our colleagues have been working on online English Kiswahili AI dictionary to actually enhance common understanding in Kiswahili language on AI-related terminologies. This is kind of a work that we do in practical terms to support multilingualism.

Another point where UNESCO has crowned is the International Decade on Indigenous Languages, which is from 2022 to 2032. We are approaching the midterm. This is a UN decade, where UNESCO is co-chairing with the UNDESA this decade. It's really looking at the languages that many of them are really surviving existence. We're trying to mobilize stakeholders and resources to preservation, revitalization and promotion of these languages.

There is a global action plan, which has a strategic framework how we can do this work. There are 10 interlinked outputs. One of them is digital empowerment. That is really to address the digital divide. How I see how this is really influenced is that we've been trying to work with member states to establish national action plans. These national action plans are the concrete impact in the countries.

We have now 15 national action plans adopted. Some of them include digital aspects, some of them are not yet. Then there are 20 drafts, work in process where in 20 countries they are working on this. That's an area where we can also enhance our work with ICANN to include the universal acceptance in these national action plans.

This year, in February, we had a quite big conference at UNESCO HQ in Paris, language technologies for all conference, which was really looking at the focus on community empowerment and ensuring that no languages are left behind in an increasingly digitalized world. So, after that conference, we put together an editorial group that was working on a global road map for multilingualism in the digital era. This group has been working until now and the work is finished.

We had this draft on a global consultation last summer. We received quite a lot of inputs, also from ICANN, very good contributions related to universal acceptance. We're going to present this final version in the second World Summit for Social Development in November, now in Doha. During the consultation, we received a lot of concrete and practical input. We're planning to put together an action plan, because this is a higher-level recommendation for different stakeholders. But then within an action plan, we can have more concrete points.

One point that I want to bring here, which is also a broader work that we're doing, which is the advancing Internet for Trust, which is

a process that UNESCO has been leading for a couple of years now. UNESCO is emphasizing that multilingualism is a key to build trust on the Internet and shaping the platform governance. This is aligned with the Global Digital Compact and also the platform governance guidelines that UNESCO has published.

There are three key points that I would like to bring to you. First, is resilient and inclusive digital infrastructure not only expands opportunities, but also upholds the integrity of information. Secondly, trust in the digital ecosystem depends on transparent, secure systems that protect human rights and promote diverse, inclusive participation. Third, interoperability and multilingualism are vital to ensure everyone can access information, freely express themselves, and celebrate cultural diversity online, which all are very dear for UNESCO's mandates. You can see that multilingualism is not a side note at UNESCO. It's really core of our work.

So, you can see that this universal acceptance, when you look at these aspects that UNESCO is doing, it's really an enabler for our policies and work. We are working with ICANN now on a policy brief on universal acceptance, which is more or less completed. We've been working for the whole year for that, since we signed the MOU, and we hope to publish this quite soon.

And here are a few other activities that we're doing. You can see that we celebrated this year Universal Acceptance Day. UNESCO was in 18 of 59 events that took place. We also participated in the

global event and in the regional event, and we're hoping to continue this this year. We have put out a call for participants to share this event this year. Also, we participated together in collaboration on the IGF and WSIS meetings this year.

Maybe I close here, but you can see that it's quite a dynamic collaboration, and we're hoping now also when Mr. Janis Kaklis is a new director in ICANN, who used to be eight years my boss. So, I think that the collaboration is ensured for the future. We're also a member of the working group that we have been discussing here. So, thank you very much.

SARMAD HUSSAIN

Thank you, Tarja. Let's go on to the final presentation. We have just a couple of minutes left. I'll just highlight some of the work which ICANN is doing and some of the changes which is happening in that process. As we shared earlier, I think the focus is to move-- We continue to do UA awareness, but I think the focus we need to move towards UA adoption.

That is also going to be reflected in the work we are doing during the UA Day, which is coming up, where we are actually going to be potentially asking UA adoption kind of events, where UA Day event organizers may, for example, register an IDN, deploy a website using that IDN, and set up an email system and actually demo that work, so show some real implementation work rather than just simply talk about it.

Then we are also, as part of promoting our UA curriculum integration from a technical training capacity building perspective, we would like universities to, for example, maybe propose UA Days where they can see how they can integrate UA curriculum modules into their technical coursework.

The call for UA Day is out already. You can go and visit universalacceptance.day and submit a proposal if you're interested to participate. Currently, the deadline is 9th of November, 2025. However, ALAC requested us to extend this deadline, so we'll likely be extending this for two weeks. But the proposals are due in November. We continue to work with UA local initiatives as well. I'm not going to go into details. Please do look through the slides. But as I shared earlier, for local initiatives as well, we are requesting them to shift the focus from awareness activities to more adoption activities.

We are also engaging with open source communities and submitting code changes in those tools. The progress on that work was reported during the UA community update during the prep week. And we are also working very closely with multiple big tech organizations. Meta has been doing great work, and Sean already provided some update. We are also working on enabling ICANN's own systems, as there was an update provided during the prep week where we shared that 92% of ICANN systems are now UA ready.

And finally, we continue to work on building capacity, as we shared that instead of doing one-off training programs, we are now interested in integrating this training into university curriculum so that it becomes a sustainable process. And the new generation coming out, a new generation of programmers they already know about these issues and can solve for these issues. So if you're interested, please get in touch with us at uaprogram@icann.org.

We also continue to work with the community and raise awareness more broadly. There is already a lot of good work happening in the community right now. We have the UA committee of ccNSO, UA-IDN and Working Group of GAC. We also, as shared, set up a UA expert working group to guide ICANN's work. There is an IDN working group at ALAC. We are also working with other organizations, UNESCO Association of African University. We recently signed an MOU with ALETI, which is the Association of Software Companies in Latin America. And we obviously also continue to engage at international forums like IGF and WSIS.

So that's just an overview of how ICANN is changing its direction towards adoption, extending its collaboration, and supporting the community within ICANN. I hope you found this presentation useful. I especially want to call out our new comers. And there is actually a QR code here if you can scan this code, provide us some feedback on how you liked this session, how we can improve this session for you, and it would be great to hear back from you or others in the room as well to improve this.

Unfortunately, we don't have time to take any more questions I see your hand up Jiankang, and Maria. May I request you to please send your questions to us at uaprogram@icann.org. If you want to make one quick comment, please, just less than one minute, please go ahead, and then we'll close.

CHINA

Thank you so much. This is [01:03:26 – inaudible] from China. I want to make sure what about ICANN or UA Expert Group, how can help us like a local initiative to solve some specific problems like the issues such as the Safari browser on iPhones currently doesn't support IDN domain names the last two years. We emailed them and they said, you need a hierarchy such as HTTP or CW. But before they can to support IDNs. Now if you just write IDN domain names, it goes for search. So I want to make sure how ICANN can make some good support, good example for local initiatives, such as the big technique on ICANN or Meta, some programs. Thank you.

SARMAD HUSSAIN

Right, thank you. So that problem is known and we are trying to reach out to the team, relevant team to address that. But I won't be able to get in more detail at this time. Please share your input back to us through uaprogram@icann.org, and maybe after the session, we can have a conversation. Not right after this session, but during the meeting here. Before we close, I'll hand the floor to Maarten for a quick concluding remark.

MAARTEN BOTTERMAN

Yes, thank you. Thank you for being here again. It's been good to get this update. It's good to see we're on track in moving forward. And yes, Satish, your remark about interaction, it's clear that for interaction all lines are open. There is this email address that Pitinan shared in the chat. There is these people within the ICANN community that are participating. And for ALAC, I think it's Edmon. So you can also nag him directly. And with the industry and other platforms. Also at IGF, there is the Policy Network on Meaningful Access that has serious interest in this. So, feel free to sign up in that as well.

I mean this is not the end this is a step and a good step forward, and we look forward to further enhancement as expressed in the strategic plan, but also emphasize the fact that you're in this room. So, Sarmad much thank you very much, team very much, and all very much for helping making this progress further.

SARMAD HUSSAIN

Thank you, Maarten. Yes, thanks. Let's thank our panelists for presenting. And thank you all for attending. Thank you also for the tech support team for helping us out. Thank you. We'll close the session.

[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]