
ICANN84 | AGM – Joint AFRALO-AfrICANN Session
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MICHELLE DESMYTER

This session will now begin. Please start the recording. Hello, and welcome to the Joint AFRALO African 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.

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I will now hand the floor over to Hadia Elminiawi, AFRALO Chair.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you so much, and welcome all to AFRALO African Session. Today, we are discussing a statement about digital divide and the risks of internet fragmentation.

Note: The following is the output resulting from transcribing an audio file into a word/text document. Although the transcription is largely accurate, in some cases may be incomplete or inaccurate due to inaudible passages and grammatical corrections. It is posted as an aid to the original audio file but should not be treated as an authoritative record.

I would like to start by acknowledging the presence and welcoming Sally Costerton, Senior VP, Global Stakeholder Engagement, Dr. Catherine Adeya, Board Director member, Alan Barrett, Board Director member, León Sánchez, Board Director selected by the At-Large Community, Pierre Dandjinou, Vice President, Stakeholder Engagement, Africa, and Jonathan Zuck, ALAC Chair. And welcome, Jonathan, and the floor is yours.

JONATHAN ZUCK

Okay. Thank you, Hadia. And thanks for having me here at this meeting. I always appreciate being a part of these discussions. The African continent is so critical to the future of the internet and the growth of the internet. That's where so much of that growth is going to come from. And whenever I read these position statements that get created at each meeting, I'm always so full of ideas but I'm a little humbled by my lack of knowledge about all the complexities of the issues on the African continent.

But there's something that continues to nag at me is the idea that—oh, for the camera, sorry. Something that continues to nag at me is that somehow, we have to turn this into a commercial objective. In other words, given the fact that Africa is the future of growth for the internet, and there is so much business interest in that growth, that making some of these issues about fragmentation, about security, about consumer trust, et cetera, should be thought of less in my mind as a kind of call for help and more of a plan to maximize wealth building within that region, right? And really get commercial

support for a lot of the things that need to happen for that growth to occur.

I don't know exactly how that should take place but I think—are you [inaudible] me? Oh, I'm sorry, okay. But I'm always concerned about running up against ICANN's remit for some of these things, right? In some cases, we might want to take a serious look at what role the grant program can play in some of these areas. And obviously, some of these things, Sally will probably tell you that GSE is doing now. But some of these investments we're talking about really ought to be commercial investments because of the commercial returns that are possible if some of this is resolved.

And so, I think we should noodle together how to make this into a commercial proposal and less of a kind of NGO style proposal at some point in the future. But I think that this hits on some of the most important points for success within the African region. And so, I'm very supportive of this and I'm glad to be a part of this conversation, so thank you.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you so much, Jonathan. And I took note of actually what you said. And with that, I would like to welcome again, Sally, and give her the floor. Thank you.

SALLY COSTERTON

Thank you. Does that work? Can you hear me? Yeah, okay. So, thank you very much, Hadia, and thank you very much for inviting

me, and I'm representing Kurtis here as well as unfortunately he had a scheduling conflict.

Firstly, I wanted to congratulate you. This is the 39th meeting, which has been held about African ICANN community at every ICANN meeting since 2010. Well, I've been at most of those since the end of 2012, so I feel very invested personally in this region and the partnership that you have had for so long with ICANN and within Africa and with your global colleagues.

I read your statement with great interest. In the last year or so, I've been doing a lot of work with my colleagues in the engagement function around the world and also, with my partner colleagues, if you like, who handle engagement in other functions like John Crane's team, our comms team, our government engagement team, to try and crack one big problem, how do we get people who can affect our ability to deliver our mission, to understand what we do, and most importantly, why what we do matters to them?

And you talk about this in your statement because you say, if they do not understand, there is a risk that they will accidentally fragment the internet. You don't say it quite like that, but in my opinion, that is the key as kind of at the heart of what is the risk of not acting. Now you talk about access and you talk about connectivity and other issues, but I think from an engagement standpoint, I wanted to let you know that we are doing a lot of work, and as many of you know, I sat in the interim CO seat for a while, and doing that both took me to Africa, but took me into far

more of the meetings with critical stakeholders, not always in governments, although often, and regulators with media, with journalists, with influencers in Africa and in all over the world.

And it really came home to me that when we show up, we often go straight into talking about how ICANN works. Let me tell you about the multistakeholder process. Let me convince you that this is the right way to do things. Let me talk to you about new gTLDs, becoming an ASP, this kind of thing. And sometimes, we don't start with a story that is where they are. And where I think you are coming from with this statement, and we are coming from, is driving towards a world where there is a clearer understanding of how the internet system of unique identifiers is the invisible foundation for the global digital economy.

And therefore, they are a vital component of society. So, I just share that with you. It's still kind of, we're playing with it a little bit, but I think to bring the kind of stakeholders also that Jonathan is talking about, business stakeholders, commercial stakeholders around a lot of the other issues in the statement, they need to be convinced. They need to understand, well, why should they? What role do they play? Why is this thing that we're doing over here at ICANN relevant to them?

And so, I offer that. I hope it's helpful. The teams are working also very closely with Hadia, and through the RALO, and we actually met earlier this week to expand on how we're working on that together and we're deepening this much more strategic focus on how can

we use altogether the way we engage with stakeholders, whether they're familiar or unfamiliar, to drive those outcomes. And the outcomes are what you talk about in this document. So, I wanted to share that with you. Happy to take questions. But again, thank you for letting us be here with you, and look forward to the rest of this meeting. Thank you, Hadia.

HADIA ELMINIAMI

Thank you, Sally. And indeed, we did have a great talk, and we did look at the way forward. Without further ado, I would like to turn the floor to León Sánchez. I know you have another commitment after this, so I give you the floor. Thank you.

LEÓN SÁNCHEZ

Thank you very much, Hadia. And apologies in advance because I will have to leave early as I have to be in another session as well. Well, first, thanks for having me again here. I've said it many times, one of my favorites, if not my favorite session in every ICANN meeting, and I always push our operations team to give it top priority in my agenda, so that I can attend.

As usual, I am delighted to read the statement that you have drafted. It's a product of a lot of effort and a lot of work by people that I am dear to. And I would like to concentrate in two aspects of this statement, point 2 and point 3, which refer to promoting digital inclusion and capacity building and safeguarding the internet operability. Because I think at some point, these two are linked

between themselves in trying to build these capacities into our lawmakers and in our decision makers.

When we are talking about fragmentation, a lot of it has to do with what has been called digital sovereignty. And I think that digital sovereignty, to a certain extent, contributes to fragmenting the internet. And the more we are able to build capacities into our lawmakers and try to include them in this digital environment, in this digital ecosystem by building these capacities into them, the less they will be inclined to build regulation and legislation that fosters fragmentation and that divides the internet.

So, with that, I would like to wish you a very fruitful discussion. Congratulate you for this excellent statement. And of course, thank you again for having me and for keeping inviting me to these sessions. Thank you. Thank you very much.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you, León. And of course, you're welcome to stay with us. But if you want to go to your other session, you're free, of course, to do so. And now I give the floor to Dr. Catherine Adeya. Catherine, the floor is yours.

CATHERINE ADEYA

Thank you very much, Hadia. And like León, I think we are in a difficult position because of conflicting—we've got a conflict, but we continue to encourage, and I'm sure Sally and Tim will keep looking at it and how we can participate more in this session.

But I'm glad to be here, as usual. And I read the statement and asked myself, as I usually do, you always know I step back and I ask what else is being discussed in the African context on internet fragmentation, and if it speaks to your statement. And I found some very rich work that's going on and concern. And I think some of the things that stuck out to me are things like, in some cases, you are talking, but people are talking about different definitions on what they understand about fragmentation. Even the very lawmakers that you're talking about.

But some of the things that I found that speak a lot to your statement are things to do with how to address internet fragmentation in the African context and what people are looking at. Of course, there's been a discussion about the need to collaborate amongst member states, and I think that is already—you speak to that in your statement because this can play a pivotal role in what León was talking about, about harmonizing regulatory frameworks, maybe promoting cross-border connectivity.

But one thing that also stood out, and I think you infer to it, is the issue of promotion of multilingualism. This is one thing we can never ignore in Africa. And they say it does contribute to some extent, depending on how you define it, on internet fragmentation. If you think about it, most of the internet is in—I mean, mostly it's English, French, Portuguese. I know we've spoken about this. It neglects the needs of the speakers of indigenous and minority languages. So, the percentage you'll find in maybe Twi, Zulu, Swahili, Afrikaans, Kinyarwanda is very little. And some actually say

that this is causing more of a divide, and could also then contribute to the very internet fragmentation we are talking about. But these are all issues that, again, you speak to in your statement.

I think I'll pick one or two more. The issue of investment in infrastructure, in internet infrastructure, in the underserved and rural areas, because this is definitely going to help in bridging the digital divide. And this, of course, then would then help in the issues of internet fragmentation, the risks that people are seeing. This is very important. And I think you also spoke about the need for advocacy of digital rights, and fostering digital literacy.

So, in all, yes, there are significant challenges, there are significant risks. You've highlighted them in a way that is very useful for this statement. But my point is, you've also spoken to what the research is saying. And for that, I congratulate you in your statement. Thank you.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you so much, Dr. Catherine. I've noted all the points that you have highlighted. And with this, I turn the floor to Alan Barrett.

ALAN BARRETT

Thank you, Hadia. This is Alan Barrett, a member of the ICANN board. Thank you for inviting me. I do enjoy coming to these sessions. Unfortunately, I can't stay long. I have to go to another board engagement. But I read the statement with interest. It's very comprehensive and well-written, as usual. It never surprises me to

see that the statement is well-written. I've come to expect that. So, well done, thank you.

On the issue of fragmentation, I think it's very important to consider the public interest and especially the interest of the end-users. If the users are going to be confused because they don't know when they go to some domain name, they don't know whether they're going to get one in the DNS namespace or one in some other namespace, that's certainly a problem. And you've highlighted it in the document.

Related to fragmentation, I want to mention shutdowns. Governments sometimes think that the internet is a threat to them. I'm not sure why. Maybe they think that people will discuss how to coordinate protests. Maybe they think students will cheat on their exams. It's understandable that governments would have these concerns. But I think they should not address those concerns using shutdowns. They should find some other way to deal with those concerns. So, if you have input to government policymaking, I'd like you to convey the idea that shutdowns do not help the end-users, do not help the population at large.

Then I see the statement mentions the regional internet body such as AFRINIC, and I'm very pleased that AFRINIC now has a board. I see three board members sitting around the table right now. So, thank you, congratulations to those. I see Adewale, Aziz and Fiona. Congratulations, you've got a hard job in front of you. It's a difficult job, but we trust you. We know you're strong. You can do it.

Okay, I think I've said enough. Thank you very much for inviting me.
I'll stay a few minutes more and then I'll have to leave.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you, Alan. Dr. Catherine, you wanted to add?

CATHERINE ADEYA

Sorry. I think our minds were so much running up and down that I forgot one very important thing that you brought in the statement that I don't find discussed in a lot of research when you're talking about internet fragmentation in Africa, and that's the issue of DNS abuse. Very clear in the statement, the issue of DNS abuse and noting that many users don't know how their domain names can be resolved, and this can lead to major security risks.

And you discuss your recommendations, especially on the DNS security, DNS business. This you don't find in a lot of other research. So, this one I wanted to emphasize and I think I just forgot. Thank you.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you, Dr. Catherine. And now we go to Pierre Dandjinou, Vice President, Stakeholder Engagement, and Pierre is with us online.

PIERRE DANDJINOU

Hello, can you hear me?

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Yes, we can. Thank you so much, Pierre. Please, go ahead.

PIERRE DANDJINOU

Thank you. Thank you very much for having me here. My name is Pierre Dandjinou, VP, Stakeholder Engagement, and working in Africa. And also, so sorry not being there physically with you because I had to actually cancel my trip to Dublin in the very last minute. But thanks to technology, I can be following everything and then talking to you. It's a pleasure.

Well, basically, as far as we are concerned in Africa, in the Stakeholder Engagement, the African [inaudible], we are always happy to join. And like I always say, well, most of us, we belong to At-Large at some point. I would like to—because most have already been said. In fact, as far as the statement is concerned, of course, I find it quite well-crafted. It's great. I also think that it is really, you have been bold enough to tackle such issues within Africa, especially when we deal with so many different activities pertaining to capacity development, pertaining to having the appropriate infrastructure, working on the DNS, for instance, in Africa. Trying to make this DNS much more managed to the profits of the community.

But also, think about the security of each. That's why we are, say, for instance, deploying the DNSSEC roadshows, whereby we are able to help places now, countries now, secure their zone file. It's quite important all of those things. And you mentioned the DNS, for

instance. The bulk of what we are doing, in fact, is about this DNSSEC security and also, management.

I would like to also—I mean, one of the things that you raised is about coordination, which is key. You also, of course, discussed the multistakeholder which is quite important. So, for me, the issue is going to be how much of this can you sort of transfer into the countries locally? You remember, whenever I come to this meeting, I'm always insisting on the local part of what you guys are delivering. How much of this transfer into your countries, for instance, so that the stakeholder there should understand? Because it's also about understanding the issues.

Alan rightly pointed out the shutdowns, for instance, which is something I was thinking when I read your statement. We are having them, so many of them, and even these days, we are having them because we are going through relations with different countries, and you just know that well for maybe one day, two days, there is no more internet connectivity because it has been shut down. How do you sort of, discuss locally? What conversation do we have locally so that these things, people understand and eventually do things differently?

Your statement, in fact, is calling for so many things, but there is also some homework to be conducted. I would like to stop here by saying that, well, in terms of supporting the recommendation that you have, what you addressed to ICANN, we are here to really support, and we are always listening to you, want to know your

requests. And I also would like to also thank you very much because recently, your team, I mean, the At-Large, you are also fundamental to our Africa strategy that now has been developed.

Now we do have also our operational plan for the year that we are now going to be sort of put in place. So, thanks so much for that sort of support. And, yeah, again, thank you also for having me and wishing all of us a very fruitful sort of meeting, ICANN84. Thanks, and back to you, Hadia.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you so much, Pierre. You have spoken about shutdowns, Alan as well. That's why when we actually presented this statement, we did not tackle fragmentation only from one aspect. Not only from the policy perspective, but we addressed many other aspects, such as infrastructure access, data localization, regulations. So, the intent was to look at it from different perspectives.

And with that, I would like now to turn the floor to Abubakari Saddiq Adams, and he's the penholder of the statement. Abubakari is with us online.

ABUBAKARI SADDIQ ADAMS

Hello. I hope you can hear me.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

We hear you. If you can just raise your voice a little bit, but we do hear you. Please, go ahead.

ABUBAKARI SADDIQ ADAMS

Oh, okay. Thank you so much for the opportunity. I'm Abubakari Saddiq Adams. I'm the penholder for this statement. Thank you so much for the opportunity. I'm a GhanaSIG fellow from Ghana. So, actually, this statement, when we announced it, we really got a lot of people to contribute a lot. I think when it comes to the fragmentation that we are talking about, if we use the same energy and the same collaboration that a lot of people—we had over 13 people including myself all contributing from every part of Africa. They were all trying their best to get it.

Actually, everybody here have already said something about our statement and pointed out areas of strength of our statement. So, our statement, we are really trying and hoping that whatever we put together will be considered and the needed support and everything that we need to make this work. Hello?

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Yes, we hear you loud and clear. Please, go ahead.

ABUBAKARI SADDIQ ADAMS

Okay. So, just the same, what I've been talking about, that's why I'm here, because currently I am, in a way, feeling like my internet is not strong enough because I keep seeing it loading. But these are some of the issues why we strongly believe that when we get

support for Africa to look at issues of digital divide. And also, sometimes we just ask everybody—we are pointing out the local issues too. Mostly, people taking national security and use it as a way to stop people from enjoying the internet the way we were supposed to enjoy the internet.

We are also looking at, what's the name, Africa Continental Free Trade with a stronger internet connectivity with a united internet. This will also help promote the continental free trade within Africa, so that Africans can trade among themselves. That's also one of the things that we were very, very concerned about and we were very, very interested about. So, we are hoping that any support and all the right guidance are put in place, so that we make sure that Africans and Africa can always have a stronger internet and a united internet so we also enjoy everything other parts of the world is enjoying.

Yes, when it comes to the language issue, yes, with that one we are still trying because we need to look at our normal education system. Our local languages have been relegated to the back. So, we don't want to, yes, to go beyond only the internet aspect. It has to go into our educational system. Okay, thank you for now. I'll leave my statement here, then the others can continue. Thank you so much.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you, Abubakari Adams, penholder of the statement. And now we go to Setondji Hervé. Setondji will present the statement to us.

HERVÉ
HOUNZANDJI

SETONDJI Okay. Thank you, Hadia. I have only six minute, so I cannot read all the statement. I just want to enumerate the four recommendation and read the part of AFRALO call to action. So, the four recommendations are—the first is expand affordable connectivity, the second is promote digital inclusion and capacity building, the third is safeguard internet interoperability, and the last one is strengthen cybersecurity interest.

So, now, I can read the part of AFRALO's call to action. The first, preserve a unified internet. We urge all stakeholders to uphold the principle of openness, interoperability, and inclusivity in internet governance. Two, invest in infrastructure and skills. African countries need sustainable investment in last-mile connectivity, affordable bandwidth communities, networks, and digital literacy program with special focus on marginalized groups.

Then strengthen multistakeholder collaboration. Government, the private sector, civil society, and technical communities must work together to align policies and standards that keep the internet unified and resilient. Then foster local content and innovation, promoting local content, multilingualism, and regional interconnection points. IXPs can lower cost, increase resilience, and strengthen Africa's digital ecosystem. Then, evidence-based

policy, decisions affecting the internet architecture or data flows should be transparent, consultative, and grounded in technical evidence to avoid unintended fragmentation.

Then human rights as digital rights. Internet access should be seen as a fundamental human right, viewing connectivity through this lens redefines the digital divide as a social justice issue, not just a technical one. Then champion a resilient and decentralized internet, focus on decentralized infrastructure and open standards to prevent any single entity from controlling information flow by supporting more internet exchange points and advocating against monopolies in digital infrastructure.

And the last, discuss emerging technologies and their impact on the DNS namespace to develop practical solutions that allow the internet and the namespaces to grow safely. So, now I can just read the conclusion. AFRALO reaffirms its commitment to the ICANN At-Large communities' role in championing the public interest and amplify the voices of end-users especially from underserved regions. Bridging the digital divide while safeguarding the internet global and interoperable nature is essential to ensure that all Africans can fully benefit from the digital economy.

Africa stands at a decisive moment in its digital journey, bridging the digital divide while protecting the internet openness are twin priorities that will determine whether the continent thrives in the digital economy. By empowering stakeholders, strengthening collaboration and allowing global support with Africa's realities,

we can ensure an internet that remains one, open, secure, and for all. It is critical that Africa not only participates in but actively shapes the norms, standards, and policies that govern the global internet.

Africa's voice must be central to ensuring that the internet evolves in a way that is inclusive, equitable, and effective of our shared values. We call [inaudible] ICANN regional organizations and all stakeholders to join Africa in this commitment to inclusivity and resilience. Together, we can build a digital future that saves every community across the continent and beyond. We could also create a group to initiate an action plan toward the creation of a think tank within AFRALO [inaudible].

This think tank will reach out to Eastern expertise to make a baseline suggest solution and approaches to mitigate the digital divide through proven mechanisms in Africa. It will also serve as a platform to discuss emerging technologies and the impact on the DNS ecosystem and the broader internet landscape in Africa. Thank you. Back to you. Back to you, Hadia.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you, Hervé. And now we open the floor to discuss, modify, and adopt the statement if there is an agreement. And with that, I turn the floor to Brahm Futsulani, AFRALO Vice-Chair.

BRAHM FUTSULANI

Thank you, Hadia, for the—Brahm for the record. Yes. So, for those that have just been listening to the conversations, I think this gives us a platform for us to input to the document before it's finalized and submitted to the board. So, if you have any comments or any addition that you think needs to go in the document, now would be the best time, if you can put your [inaudible]. Thank you. Dr. Aziz?

AZIZ HILALI

Just a note. Usually, we have both the version English, and French. Why we don't have the French version this time? Just a remark. We don't have a French? No, in the link. Not yet, okay. That's all.

BRAHM FUTSULANI

Anyone with a comment? Yes, please.

JIM DIGWE

Thank you. My name is Jim Digwe. I'm a researcher in international cybersecurity at University College London. I'm very glad to be able to read this, and thank you so much for the presenters for everything you said about this. And I'm very excited to see the work that is being done here at ICANN, Africa and AFRALO. I'm curious as to whether the inclusion of academic, specifically African academics will be particularly helpful here. I'm just looking at the point at which we talk about shared African values, for example. And I'm just curious as to how, for example, we are [inaudible] that, but how we're establishing their translation in this context.

You've also referenced the development of a think tank. And I would be really interested to know if you're considering, for example, not just promoting fellowships from within the ICANN community, but also helping establish the wider internet governance scholarship on the continent. Just to make sure that at least we have that other avenue of influence in the wider internet governance ecosystem. Thank you.

BRAHM FUTSULANI

Okay, that's noted. So usually, just to give a hint to those that maybe are part of the process for the first time, we—I mean, these are great input that we're getting from yourself. And obviously, what we will do is, through the Secretariat is, we note all of them, and take note of them in the actual final document itself, so noted. Any other takers? Yes, Hadia. Ah, Okay. I take him, and then we come to you. Thank you.

ADEBUNMI AKINBO

Thank you. Adebunmi Akinbo for the record, incoming ALAC. Okay. So, first of all, I want to say a big thumbs up for the final documentation and presentation. It is actually a highly academic document, and I agree with the last question from my other brother here, who seems to be eager to let us hit the ground running with a think tank.

I must confess also that he added one little information, which is internet governance fellowship, which I think we can start from the

AFRALO end to begin to encourage people. But most of all, if we look at the final line of the presentation by the secretary, which lays the emphasis on a platform where we look at the mechanisms, the divide, mitigations, I think it's a good document we will be presenting at the end of the day. And we should be prepared to have that think tank ready and running. Thank you.

BRAHM FUTSULANI

Thank you. That's also been noted. Hadia? Thank you.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Yes. Thank you, Brahm. I just wanted to understand more, or maybe to discuss more this part that was pointed out about—it is in the statement, of course, the think tank and the internet governance. So, how do you think we could go forward with this? Because in the statement, we just put think tank, but we don't really say how to go forward with it. And maybe it's a good idea now to think how AFRALO could actually create this little research community or research community that can actually work on topics of interest to the ICANN community and AFRALO.

ADEBUNMI AKINBO

Thank you, Madam Chair. Adebunmi Akinbo for the record. Okay. So, I'm looking at the think tank, and also, looking at the historical antecedent from AFRALO as the body. We have often had these meetings at almost every ICANN gathering. We have always had this particular document prepared and under your leadership, this

has been prepared in such a way and manner to ensure we do not have to come back with more challenges, but rather reports and loopholes where we believe ICANN can now go ahead to support us with. Which means we set it up with people we believe can make this particular document come to life in Africa, which is one.

Two, we begin dissecting it, unbundle the opportunity to address the issues and then when we get to a stage where we know, because this is possible, that we may lack the funding that we need. So, if we get to that stage, we're able to document it and say, "Oh, at this point in time, we need the intervention of a bigger body." ICANN, probably sponsors who are either in Africa or who are willing to support African innovations and initiatives. When it comes to the selection, I believe that the chair with the leadership of the house can always do a due diligence to ensuring that we get the right team to deliver this.

Again, there is a [inaudible] of research that we can always work out with. And everyone would always come to AFRALO and say, we want your research document because you have done it thoroughly. So, I believe, like you said, we can start it here right now and start building that particular structure for the think tank. And I bet you, by the time we are ending this, ICANN84 we'll be going places with it. Thank you.

BRAHM FUTSULANI

Thank you. We can go to...

RAÏHANATH GBADAMASSI

Thank you. It's Raïhanath for the record. I will speak in French. So, I wanted to talk about your concern. It's been 10 years that we've writing statements, and as usual, they're always very nice documents, nice reflections. But most of the time, they end up in our archives. And they end up forgotten. So, should we not now do what we do at every ICANN meeting? Couldn't we add another step to what we do at every ICANN meeting? We're talking about a think tank. Well, this is the moment for us now to create a small monitoring follow-up team to make sure that this statement is followed up upon. Because we write very interesting document, and we know the content of the document is very good but what's next?

These are very hot topics, very important topics that we're talking about. Issues that deeply impact our community. So, could we go further than just writing a document? I believe that would be very interesting if we can do that at every ICANN meeting. Thank you very much. And this was Raïhanath talking.

BRAHM FUTSULANI

Thank you, Raïhanath. It's getting heated, but I will let Wisdom come in and then we can go to Enerst across the table.

WISDOM DONKOR

Yeah. Thank you very much. My name is Wisdom, speaking for myself. Yes, thank you very much. I'm just seeing this statement. I

think after this, I'm going to take my time and then go through it and see maybe what contribution I can give. But then, we are talking about issues of fragmentations. It's not that we don't know what the issues are. So, if we really want to have an impact in Africa, or we really want to be seen as solving the problem, we need to look into the various stakeholders.

The first one is government. We need to look at the issues within the government cycle and then try to address them. Because as I'm speaking, most of our governments are not trying to take control over some of the digital resources and all of that and we really have to look into it. Cybersecurity authorities are now coming up. And then they are now coming up and most of them, too, are not looking at helping the people solve their problem. But what they are looking out for is [inaudible]. How to arrest, prosecute, and all of that, instead of trying to identify the problems and then helping communities solve them.

Most of these cyber security authorities are not trying to somehow, as you say, compete with the registries because they think issues of cybersecurity—I mean, one way or the other, the registry is part of them and all of that. So, we have to look at the issues critically. And also, we also need to look at the sub-regions. West Africa issues, East Africa issues. Look at it from that angle, try to identify the issues within those regions and then we also try to see what solutions we can come up with to help. And then looking at that

holistic, maybe from the African level, so that we bring all of them together.

And then if we are able to do that, then we should be able to share infrastructure. The infrastructure that they are talking about because we see data centers bringing up all around. But then we are not trying to do anything to bring this together to share those infrastructure within our continent. We still have our government even going out from our continent to host their services outside and all of that. We are talking about our sovereignty, and these are some of the things. Internet exchange points, we also need to look at this at the African level, at the national level. We need to be looking at all of this and then these are the things that will promote the regional trade and all of that that we are talking about.

So, we need to look at it carefully and then try to come up with solutions to even help government, because government is part of us. We need to find a problem and then help the government and also make them understand. Most of them don't even understand what DNS is. We are talking about DNS. They don't understand. When issue of server [inaudible] come, they take it and then they want to nationalize it. So, we need to look at these things seriously and then try to help address it. And also, capacity building, awareness creation and then we should be fine. Thank you.

BRAHM FUTSULANI

Thank you, Wisdom. Enerst?

ENERST MAFUTA

Thank you. My name is Enerst Mafuta. I'm an ICANN fellow and also a member of AFRALO, so I'm glad to be here to contribute for the first time physically. When your seniors speak first, they always speak everything. Now you [inaudible]. All right. So, I've been looking at this document and I also have time also to look at it and also, maybe to share my views about it. But for now, let me concentrate on the issues of think tank.

So, in my day-to-day job, I sit on the technical committee of our Zambian ICT regulator. Part of our job is to develop standards for the ICT sector for quality of service. So, how we do this is that we usually have what we call study questions that we look at through the middle of ITU, depending on the current challenges that we're facing in Zambia then. We develop that standard, we adopt it, then it goes to parliament, stuff like that.

Now coming with a think tank here, I was thinking, for it to be more inclusive and for it to work, it needs to be really simple on what to be looking at. Because I've looked at the document, we're talking about a lot of things. Like you said, there's issues of fragmentation, which is not just an easy thing. It's got a national interest attached to it, and we have also the issues of a digital divide, which clearly addresses—this think tank says that we're going to source local experts to look into the issues of a digital divide. Maybe with regards to DNS and everything.

So, in my view, as a suggestion, I was thinking maybe we come up with some kind of a topic within AFRALO. Maybe within this think tank, which we can look at maybe for a study period or maybe a month, then through that topic, maybe we can present some output recommendation, then we take it up to the higher level, stuff like that. Because otherwise, if we concentrate on many things, I'm sorry, we're not going to achieve much. And most importantly, this think tank should have outputs and come up with policies that are future proof and forward-looking. Thank you.

BRAHM FUTSULANI

Thank you, Enerst. Very quickly, one minute.

SETH ADJEI GYIMAH

Okay. Thank you very much.

BRAHM FUTSULANI

Sorry. For the record, just mention your name and then—

SETH ADJEI GYIMAH

Yes, yes, yes.

BRAHM FUTSULANI

Thank you.

SETH ADJEI GYIMAH

Seth Gyimah for the record, ICANN84 fellow. First of all, I'd like to applaud the panel desk for such a wonderful statement. My contribution is very simple. You could see from the statement that the key to sustainable digital inclusion is basically the youth. And as someone coming from academia, I work with a lot of young people, and I could see that most of them lack knowledge when it comes to issues of ICANN, issues of AFRALO, issues of internet governance and all of that.

So, I'm thinking we should highlight a lot of youth stuff within the statement. Youth and probably women should be highlighted with regards to the digital inclusion stuff. That's why I wanted to add to it. Thank you.

BRAHM FUTSULANI

Thank you so much. Hadia, I think this marks the end of our interventions. Dr. Aziz, you have your hand up? Hello?

AZIZ HILALI

We have some hand raised in the online.

BRAHM FUTSULANI

Oh, okay. Sorry, I don't have visibility. Maybe you can help us with that. Thank you.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

You still have Chokri, Daniel, [inaudible], yeah. Chokri now.

BRAHM FUTSULANI

Chokri, if you can hear us, please come on the mic. Thank you.

CHOKRI BEN ROMDHANE

Can you hear me?

BRAHM FUTSULANI

Yes, yes.

CHOKRI BEN ROMDHANE

Thank you very much, Hadia and Brahm for this opportunity. I was part of the draft team of this statement. I would like just to answer our friend from the room who asked that we have to follow this statement and check whether the recommendation or all the content of the statement was taken in account by the ICANN board and [inaudible]. I personally think that this is mainly the role of the representative of Africa within this [inaudible] to follow the reaction of the board, the ALAC member, and other representatives of Africa in the ICANN structure and to give out this feedback about this reaction. This is mainly the role of our representative.

So, I personally appreciate if some of the board member will discuss this statement with the board and give us any feedback about it, or our ALAC representative could also give us feedback from the ALAC. It's also the case for other representatives. Thank you very much.

BRAHM FUTSULANI

Thank you, Chokri. I am going to quickly give one minute to each of the online participants. I see we have five. If you can strictly remain within your one minute. So, I'll start with Daniel and then go to Olajide, and then Thoko, and then Fatimata, in that order. Thank you.

DANIEL NANGHAKA

Thank you very much, Brahm. Daniel here. Following the discussions supposedly is that, one of the things that we have to appreciate is that there is a growing tension between the need to preserve an open internet, which has become a very interesting challenge of this data age. We know the role that nations are seeking to address this [inaudible] issue over their respective data spaces.

But the issue of protecting data, infrastructure, national interests, all of these efforts are leading to internet fragmentation. And if this is not carefully aligned within the global standards, then you'll find that policies such as the national internet gateways, data location mandates, state-owned DNS systems, all of them risk isolating the networks. And once the networks are isolated, then there's a lot of undermining of the global interoperability of the internet.

We speak about the think tank addressing these issues, but it goes way beyond the think tank. It comes to the best implementation frameworks that have to come in. If we are to become advocates of

change, how are we going to implement this? We need to know that in the need to safeguard [inaudible] sovereignty without sacrificing openness and innovations, all this affect all that. But at the heart of all this, there is one thing that we need to look at, which is the internet number registry, the system. And this ensures that there is appropriate, fair and coordinated distribution of IP addresses in these auto mass system numbers.

And if we are to strengthen the regional governance structures within the RIRs like AFRINIC, APNIC, and all that, we begin to look at a straight path of an inclusive and transparent multistakeholder process. And this can be able to reinforce the [inaudible] sovereignty and build a global trust.

BRAHM FUTSULANI

Sorry, Daniel. If you can wind up, please. You've done two minutes already.

DANIEL NANGHAKA

To be able to solve these respective challenges. But I think we should begin to gear our statements in implementing the different policy groups and the statements that we make as AFRALO. Thank you.

BRAHM FUTSULANI

Thank you, Daniel. Olajide?

SEGUNFUNMI OLAJIDE

Yeah, I'm here. All right. My name is Segunfunmi Olajide. And I've not been actively engaged or engaging with AFRALO. But I'd like to ask a few questions, so as to clarify the path forward. This document we're sharing, is this the first time that it's been shared with the public, or maybe you've done that within your mailing list, which you've done that. Okay. It's exciting to see this direction we are going. But at the same time, I have some thoughts as regards what we should be looking at.

We've had several challenges within the African space as regards the internet. And I want to find out again, is this scope that we are focusing on, or we have the opportunity to expand this to cover other areas like DNS abuse, which has become a big deal in Africa? Okay. So, what I'll ask in summary, because of our time is, I would like to get actively more involved, and I'll be happy if you're able to add me to your billing list, so that I can get more involved. So that we can actively contribute to this.

BRAHM FUTSULANI

Thank you so much. Thoko and then we go to Fatimata. Thank you.

THOKOZILE MIYA

Thank you very much, Brahm. Thokozile Miya for the record attending online. I was one of the contributors to this document, and also serve as a chairperson of the Internet Society Chapter, South Africa, which is one of the ALS's to the AFRALO.

I think really at the core of what we're looking at is understanding digital inclusion, and how to preserve while building an internet that is trustworthy and inclusive. We have to look as ourselves coming out of this document at where the actionable items are. I think, of course, the topic of the think tank on digital inclusion and internet fragmentation is key and critical. However, if that would be the outcome action from this document and this meeting, it's very important then we have multistakeholder representation on those platforms. That is from the RRs, from academia, from African experts, youth, women, and of course, the different regional contexts of the continent.

It's very important as well that we look at ways of continuing to mitigate where internet fragmentation is taking place by looking at local affordable internet solutions, promoting the use of IXPs for further connectivity especially into rural and township areas, but then also ensuring that that internet is safe. And that's coordinating emerging technologies that may impact the DNS and ensuring that we do have appropriate mitigation strategies for understanding and localizing that DNS at a policy and at an effective level.

I think also from a technical perspective, we can advocate for more L-root servers and placing one inside of each—

BRAHM FUTSULANI

Please wind up, Thoko. Two minutes.

THOKOZILE MIYA

Yes. Placing one inside of each country in Africa is very important towards creating and maintaining localized African traffic.

But yeah, also having policymaker trainings and also, train-the-trainer trainings to advance knowledge and awareness, to advance policy and advocacy around this is very critical. So, I do also second the idea that we'd need to take this to the ICANN board, but then also take this to our localized policy makers that ensure that we are aware of this.

BRAHM FUTSULANI

Thank you, Thoko. Thoko, thank you so much. We are running out of time. Quickly, Fatimata, if you can really be within the 60 seconds. Thank you so much.

FATIMATA SEYE SYLLA

Yes. Fatimata speaking. Thank you very much, and I will be very brief. I just want to say, let's act. Let's do something. We can do something. So, let's create a small group. And then we can think on this too. We can reflect about what we can do, but we cannot say everything today. We will not be able to discuss everything today. Thank you very much. And I stress on this. Let's act. Let's create a small team, even if it's just four or five people in the beginning. But we need to act right now. Thank you very much.

BRAHM FUTSULANI

Fatimata, right on time. Thank you. Hadia, back to you.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you so much, Brahm. And thank you to everyone for your input. And I would like to note the points of discussion here. So, we were discussing the think tank and how to bring this to life. And I think the suggestion here going forward was to go ahead and create a group, a research group. And that research group will be working on issues stated in this statement, as well as also looking at previous AFRALO African statements.

So, we had this idea maybe more than a year ago to look at AFRALO's previous statements, make a review to the literature and make maybe a summary of the recommendations and call to actions that we had.

And then another point that I noted is we need to highlight more the role of youth and women in this statement. I also noted the need to highlight or focus more on the public interest, as well as internet governance.

To [Frederick], you were talking about the solutions to the problem or to the topic that we are discussing. And we have in this statement call of actions and recommendations. So, please read them and add to them. Add your thoughts to this. And Olajide, in order to be with the mailing list, please go to the website. There is a form there for members if you want to become an individual member or an At-Large structure member, what works for you best,

become one of our members. You will be added to the mailing list. You will be able to discuss and see the document and even contribute to the drafting itself. Thank you so much.

And I would like to thank Sally a lot, Sally Costerton, for being with us for the entire meeting. Thank you so much, Sally. Thank you to Africa Global Stakeholder Engagement Team, Yaovi. And Sally, if you want to say some final words.

SALLY COSTERTON

Thank you, Hadia. I think this has been a fascinating discussion. And I think I shall follow with a great deal of interest the development of the think tank idea. And you've been very clear about it. I think in this discussion, I think it sounds to me that you worked through some thinking about how to progress that already today, which is terrific. And let us know. And [inaudible] Pierre and Yaovi with this. I think this is something we can do a lot to support. And I know we want to do that. Because this is all about giving us a voice and turning that into action. And that is part of how we deliver our mission. So, it couldn't be more important.

One last thing I wanted to say, which I didn't say at the beginning, but I should have done, is I really want to take this opportunity to thank the AFRALO members and participants for the extraordinary amount of support you provided working with our teams on raising awareness of the applicant support program. It has been a huge effort. The focus coming from the community, the direction to try to do everything we can to bring more African registries to the

table. And this is the goal, of course, that more registries should be from Africa.

And the help and support that you've given our staff on this exercise. And you've done much of it yourself. The ICANN mentor program, the coach program, the ICANN in your language, there's been so much done inside our community here in AFRALO. And we've seen incredible amounts of activity, many of them to organizations and groups of people that really don't know anything about ICANN. And this is the hardest thing you can do, is go to somebody who doesn't know why they want you, or might do the thing that you want them to do, and convince them to be engaged.

So, thank you so much for that. And obviously, the program, the window for ASP, closes fairly soon. But hopefully, we will see more African applicants. I don't think you could have done more. And I really want to share that with the IRT, but I wanted to say thank you to you now in the room, because I think it has been really spectacular. So, thank you so much.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you so much. I've added those also. Notes to add them to the statement. And so, thank you again, everyone. Thank you to the interpreters for actually bearing with us and staying overtime. This meeting is now adjourned.

RODRIGUE GUIGUEMDE

Yes. Thank you, everyone. I just want to let you know, we have a session in the room, forum three on ccTLD. Yes, discussion on ccTLD for Africa. Just at 4:30 in the room forum three. Thank you very much.

[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]