

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

## Opening Speech

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**Arab Republic of Egypt**

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**Good morning everyone,**

It's a great pleasure for me to be here today welcoming back the ICANN in Cairo for its 33<sup>rd</sup> meeting. I am particularly excited to be celebrating with you the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ICANN, witnessing the significant growth of the ICANN community and the remarkable evolution of this process. Over the past 10 years, we have seen ICANN substantially progressing, despite all the changes and challenges that the Internet has faced. And today as we gather again in Cairo for this ICANN round of meetings, I would like to specially welcome, Peter Dengate Thrush, Chairman of the ICANN Board, Paul Twomey, ICANN's President and CEO, and all members of the ICANN Board. I would also like to warmly welcome all of you in Egypt. I am truly impressed to see this special gathering with representation from all stakeholders, ranging from decision-makers to technical experts, representing different sectors, government, academia, private sector as

well as end-users. It is a real pleasure to look around and see so many friends and familiar faces.

It has been 8 years since we hosted the ICANN meeting in Egypt for the first time. Many developments have taken place since then. The Internet community of Egypt has also taken many steps forward, during that period, starting with a small community of professionals then extending to the larger community; supported by and engaging in Internet Society activities. I very much acknowledge the role ISOC has played in such developments through its chapters' activities, where they have advanced the development of the Internet in general in many developing countries and especially in our region. I also acknowledge the early efforts of the African group of Internet experts and their collaborative work, which has equally advanced the development of the Internet in Africa and has resulted in many successful initiatives and organizations such as AfriNIC, AfNOG and others. I'm very happy to see pioneers of that early process also around the room.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

Today, the velocity and amplitude of changes affecting our world, in particular affecting the business environment, is creating great opportunities on one hand and of course in many ways lots of risks on the other. Market dynamics are changing rapidly, giving rise to new businesses and new business models. Industry charts are undergoing vibrant shiftings. New companies are created, while others are disappearing or merging. And above all, strong competition is extending across borders.

During the past decade, we have all experienced great leaps in business innovation that have triggered an unmatched pace in the

evolution of the Internet. This has not only affected our day-to-day activities and communications but even more is reshaping our ways of thinking and social behavior. Despite its young age, the Internet has turned very quickly into the most effective tool of change, transforming societies and driving world economies to new horizons. The Internet is presenting itself as a pre-requisite for the global information society, to an extent that it has become one of the main pillars of socio-economic development. It enjoys special characteristics which have made it to this unique and indispensable universal medium we all benefit from today.

One of the most important traits of this new era is the changing nature of Internet user relations. These are not any more limited to a “service provider-to-end user” relation but have extended to become peer-to-peer and meshed social networks. Users are no longer at the receiving end; they are becoming the primary author for content, source for information and driver for innovation. Online information is getting more and more user-generated and most importantly developed in the user’s own native language mirroring his or her local cultural heritage. The impact of this tremendous evolution on technology take-up and Internet usage is unforeseen. With over one billion PCs in use, more than 1.4 billion Internet users and a predicted 4 billion mobile users by the end of this year, the world is changing into a meshed global village.

In Egypt, Internet development has succeeded via a strong public-private-partnership and through collaborative community efforts. As we realize how much the Internet has penetrated our lives, and how critical and important it is becoming for our society, we are fully convinced that this is the platform for socioeconomic development; the platform for innovation and education, for better health services and for government services. In a deregulated environment, the ICT sector in Egypt was one

of the first sectors to demonstrate a series of successful partnerships between the government and the private sector, through a number of innovative initiatives, which has been considered nationally a role model for reform. Let me briefly give you a couple of indicators on how this sector has developed. Internet users are increasing with an annual rate of almost 40% exceeding today 11 million users. International connectivity to the Internet is growing annually with a rate of 125%. And mobile subscribers have significantly increased from only 6 million back in 2004 to more than 37 million today, with a monthly increase of almost 1 million users; one of the highest growth rates in the world.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

The crucial developmental role of the Internet is now more than ever well recognized, especially in developing regions of the world, where the next billion users are mostly expected to emerge. Thus, the Internet, is for developing countries “a space of opportunities”, that should be handled with due attention, to draw on benefits and maximize their share of the next billion. The larger Internet community should equally engage and concert efforts to overcome any implied barriers and stimulate those emerging markets. While we introduce new features to the Internet, in our attempt to strengthen its outreach, it is vital to ensure that this unique nature and irreplaceable structure of the Internet is preserved, maintained and built upon. While this offers great opportunities for interaction, and for sharing of information, it also implies many challenges generated by the technological innovation itself. An obvious example is the need for availing more resources and devising creative ways to accommodate for requirements of new user segments.

Today, as we start this second decade in ICANN's lifetime, and with the Internet at this turning point, coordinating its critical resources comes forward as a central issue of interest. We are witnessing imminent but major changes to the Internet system of unique identifiers represented in the introduction of Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs) and new generic Top Level Domains (gTLDs), and the adoption of IPv6. This obviously puts great responsibilities on ICANN and the enormous role it plays to ensure the well-functioning of this medium and support the previewed growth.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

Exhaustion of IP addresses seems like one of the most basic and pressing challenges. As demand continues to grow aggressively and with new terms being introduced, such as "the Internet of things", the need for extending the address space becomes more and more evident, especially for new user-communities and late-comers to the Internet. Current efforts to get the next billion online, suggest that developing countries will be most affected by the scarcity of IP addresses. They are expected to have an increased demand rate while the current available pool of IPv4 addresses diminishes. It is therefore necessary to secure fair allocation of the remaining address space to make sure no community is disadvantaged. We should work out appropriate policies to avoid the spread of secondary markets that would introduce additional overheads and further deprive unconnected communities. The transition to IPv6 is indispensable as its merits with regard to next generation Internet services cannot be overlooked. Yet it is evident that the transition will not be a one-step process, and that the coexistence of both v4 and v6 will inevitably remain for quite sometime, which may increase the risk of having isolated islands and introducing additional connectivity burdens.

It is hence important to encourage a wide adoption of IPv6 prior to the depletion of the current address space.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

Another crucial aspect of growth is the multilingualization of the Internet. The dearth of local languages support certainly poses many obstacles that hinder Internet penetration to large segments of societies speaking non-Latin based languages. It is therefore fair to say, that increasing Internet outreach and promoting national online services and e-government initiatives can only be accomplished, if people are enabled to use the Internet in their native languages.

Indeed a multilingual Internet involves a wide scope of different aspects, ranging from domain names and email addresses, to the availability of native content as well as localized search engines and user interfaces. While I am convinced that supporting the development of local and multilingual content is a pressing need, I strongly believe that the internationalization of domain names will be a key driver to the overall process. The domain name system offers the ease of access and provides users their desired identity and is therefore considered one of the secrets of the Internet beauty. Nevertheless the imbedded language barrier is undoubtedly a main hindrance to many user groups. I therefore trust that the introduction of internationalized domain names at the top level of the root system will be one of the most significant innovations of the Internet since its inception. It will certainly be a leap forward and a milestone in the history of the Internet, drawing a new map for online users around the globe.

In this respect, I welcome ICANN's current efforts exerted through the Fast Track process, to advance the introduction of IDN ccTLDs, in

response to the community's pressing need. Egypt is looking forward to a rapid development in this area, and will continue to actively participate to this process, which I hope to see its implementation plan go into action during 2009.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

Another major milestone of the coming phase, will be the introduction of new gTLDs; a process that you, the ICANN community, have been developing for more than three years. Expanding the domain name space is undoubtedly going to pose many technical, legal, and perhaps geo-political challenges onto ICANN. However, it is an outcome of a consensus-based, bottom-up process, through which the community has recognized that the market demands more competition and that the consumer deserves more choice. I truly believe that added-value stimulates demand, and therefore envisage that new gTLDs will potentially create new business opportunities, particularly when coupled with IDNs and in markets where products and services are tailored to specific consumer's needs.

I would like to call upon businesses in Egypt and the region to consider the value of innovation in the domain name industry, and to explore opportunities that the new gTLDs can bring to their communities.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

Over the course of ten years, since its birth, we have witnessed tremendous growth in the ICANN community with more government engagement through the Governmental Advisory Committee (GAC), an increased multi-stakeholder participation and an enhanced bottom-up process. Despite all the changes and challenges that the Internet has

faced, ICANN has made remarkable evolution in its structure and has continued to grow towards a truly global and stable organization, operating in an open and transparent manner.

As we approach the conclusion of the Joint Project Agreement (JPA) between the United States Department of Commerce (US DoC) and ICANN in September 2009, I am sure you will be thoroughly discussing this institutional transition during your meetings this week. A smooth transition to a post-JPA phase is imperative and can only be achieved if responsibility is shared by all parties and all stakeholders. I believe ICANN has taken serious steps towards fulfilling its mandate. In this context, I welcome the transparent and inclusive discussions, as well as the consultations to improve institutional confidence, that took place during the past few months. These I view as a constructive initiative and healthy dialogue that will help our reflections over the transition to a post-JPA phase and assist us in shaping the future of ICANN. I encourage all parties to engage in this process, especially parties from our region, whom I call upon to seize this opportunity and actively take part in the discussions that will take place during this week. I cannot stress strongly enough, that irrespective of the differences in our opinions and how we preview the next decade, we all share the common goal of an effective, stable and independent ICANN where all stakeholders actively engage. Let me reiterate here that Egypt is keen to see ICANN make a successful transition into a truly independent global organization. We will remain supportive of ICANN and will continue to engage in its process as a strong believer of its multi-stakeholder model.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

In conclusion I would like to stress again that the Internet needs to remain this single borderless network that we all share and through which everyone is able to interact in a free and inclusive manner. Our collaborative mission is to ensure that our coming generations will get an equal if not greater opportunity and will continue to benefit from this powerful medium.

Before giving the floor back to Peter, let me seize this opportunity to invite you all to the 2009 Internet Governance Forum (IGF), another milestone meeting that will take place in Egypt towards the end of next year and where we can all meet to share and discuss again our views and experiences.

At the end allow me to express my words of thanks to everyone who has worked hard to make this meeting a success. I extend special thanks to our local and international sponsors, to our translators and scribes and last but not least to all the organizing teams from ICANN, MCIT, NTRA and City Stars.

Finally I thank you all for your presence and participation. I trust your meetings will be fruitful and successful and wish you all a wonderful and pleasant stay in Cairo.