
KOBE – ICANN64 Middle East Space - Universal Acceptance

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NADIRA AL ARAJ: ... ICANN positions. Taking the time to welcome, to give the floor to our Vice President, Baher Esmat.

BAHER ESMAT: Thank you, Nadira. Good afternoon everyone and welcome to the Middle East Space at ICANN 64. Again, very pleased to see the Middle East Space take place one more time. We started this journey together back in Abu Dhabi, ICANN 60 in 2017, and I'm happy to see it making progress. Thanks, of course, to you, to the community, the Middle East community for your hard work, particularly to Tijani and Nadira for their leadership and making this happen and for also encouraging community to come together and prepare for this.

So, as Nadira mentioned, today we have two items on the agenda. We have the Middle East charter and then we have the core topic which is universal acceptance, a very important topic for this region and the group has worked on a draft statement that they're going to discuss with you today before finalizing it.

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So, without further ado, I'd like to ... I think, Nadia, Cherine is our next speaker, right?

NADIRA AL ARAJ: Yes.

BAHER ESMAT: Yeah. So, I'd like to first of all thank our chairman of the board, Cherine Chalaby, for joining us today despite his very busy schedule and I'd like to turn the mic over to him. Cherine?

CHERINE CHALABY: Peace be upon you. Why do you speak in English? Okay. Hello. I was asked to say a few remarks. I noticed here your universal acceptance statement and someone must have given my here speech writer some of these statements because they just turned up in my speech, so I'm not going to repeat them. That's a joke.

Universal acceptance. Let me tell you a little story. I recently visited Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Dubai. I met with the minister of ICT in these three countries and guess what was the top of their agenda? Two things: IDNs and universal acceptance. Those were the two top issues on their mind.

Why? Because they want their local community and businesses – not just community – to be able to deal in their own languages, in

their own scripts, and to encourage the propagation of the use of the Internet and the domain name system and businesses to local community and local people.

I did not know that that would be top of their agenda. I was actually quite surprised and pleased to hear about that. They're really quite taking this very seriously, so therefore your focus on universal acceptance I am sure is for the same reason they are focusing on it. So, that's quite important.

When I was also in the Middle East I visited the DNS forum for the Middle East. I don't know how many of you are familiar with that. I attended one in Cairo two years ago and this was my second one. I'm really impressed of how it has become a regular thing on people's calendar and so well-attended.

The thing that impressed me is the hunger, the hunger to learn. People were there looking for learning, for improving their skills. Why? Because there is a belief that the contribution of the digital economy, to GDP in those countries, is something that the more it increases, the more it provides jobs and business, particularly for the younger generation.

So, people who were there, not only thinking of themselves but thinking of generations to come and how to improve their life and their businesses through the digital economy.

It was something very, very impressive to be part of and I really thank Baher who invited me to the Middle East Forum and he orchestrated quite a bit of it. I was very, very pleased to do so.

I don't want to talk a lot about universal acceptance. You probably guys know more about it than I do. But today, for example, we had a strategic planning session. Quite a few people attended and the issue of universal acceptance came out. What seems to be missing is a global awareness program. Who is going to take responsibility for ensuring that all these strings and domain names are accepted the way we want them to? Is it ICANN? Is it governments? Or is it the businesses, the TLDs themselves, who are actually responsible for it?

So, it's a very interesting position. I don't know what the views are in this room, but there is a need for definitely universal acceptance because you can have as many rounds of new TLDs as you want, but if they're not universally accepted, particularly also in the local languages, then it's an issue. It will happen. It will happen over time. Over years, it will happen, but I think we need to accelerate that. That is very important.

I am going to stop here because I think I'd rather you ask me questions and I answer, if you want to. I think that's better to have an interaction this way than me reading statements.

NADIRA AL ARAJ:

Thank you, Cherine. In fact, today I was really inspired by your addressing the opening ceremony and I really ... The words you address about the implementation strategic plan and the target is ICANN strategy for the coming ICANN strategy, which also includes one of its role is 3.1 about the awareness on the universal acceptance. That opens for us a hope that there is an action is going to happen in addition to the ongoing work on the universal acceptance project. Thank you for bringing that up this morning.

CHERINE CHALABY:

On that point, we have completed our strategy for ICANN with your help, all of you. Today, we received a lot of comments. We received a lot of comments since it was posted in December. But as I said in the session, a strategic plan, you can't execute it on its own. You can look at it, read it, believe in it. You believe in the strategy. But to really implement it and measure your success, we need to develop an implementation plan for it, which we call in ICANN the operating and financial plan.

So, ICANN Org has began developing this and they're going to produce two versions of it, a short version which will be posted in June for your comments and then a fully developed version towards the end of the year.

So, you need to participate because in that effort, particularly if you want to push the universal acceptance – because one of the

goals, as universal acceptance, we have not decided how. All we decided is on the what at the moment. The how is working with the community – how we’re going to do it, how we’re going to achieve it, how we’re going to measure the success is over the next nine months. So, there’s plenty of opportunity so don’t miss the opportunity to participate, particularly if there are sessions on the operating financial plans. Participate. If there are public comments coming out on the first document, make sure you really hammer in the point about universal acceptance. That’s going to come out in June. So, make sure your points are heard all the time.

TIJANI BEN JEMAA:

Okay. Thank you very much, Cherine. I would like to draw the attention of our colleagues here that the universal acceptance was an issue even before the new gTLD program when we initiated the ccTLD fast track IDN. And now with the new gTLD, with more than three characters at the top level, it is another issue.

So, it is a real problem that it is addressed from [inaudible], but it is not yet solved and we need to continue and to work on it and we have very good people working on it, including people of our community. [inaudible], who wrote this statement is a very young Egyptian and he is an ambassador of universal acceptance. He is

working with the group and we have Sarmad who is here, who is one of the champions of that. So, several people from our community are working on it and I am sure that it will not be solved tomorrow, but it will be solved. Anything which is technical will be solved. The problem is people. It's not technical.

Okay. Any questions for Cherine?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE:

I do have a request. I don't know how many of you were in the opening ceremony. I mentioned that we have one of the objectives – you mentioned one on this – is also the improvement of the effectiveness of our governance model. On Thursday, we're going to have a session. The community is going to have a session on that. If you feel this is one area where I think you can participate and your views can be heard immediately.

Why? I mentioned there are three plans we are working on. The strategic plan, well, that is done and we've heard the comments. The operating plan is still in the process. But the governance plan is the one that is being opened up here and there is big sessions on it on Thursday.

So, please, do participate if you have views in the way we become more efficient. We become more effective in doing our business, because at the moment, the issue we have it's not that the model

is not working. The model is working and serves us very well. Frankly, we are the envy of many people. But we are strong enough and courageous enough to not slip on our laurels and to say we need to improve all the time, right?

So, there's an opportunity now for us to contribute to making even better and better and better. Something that's served us well for the last 20 years, we're going to make it serve us better for the next 20 years. So, please participate. We don't have many opportunities to do that in ICANN, to talk about our own DNA and change things and this is an opportunity and don't miss this opportunity, if you can. Thank you.

NADIRA AL ARAJ:

Thank you. Thank you for the info. Good advice. Any other questions?

AJAY DATA:

Cherine, I want to just have a request. Whenever you go as a ambassador for ICANN and the board members, if you can address universal acceptance as an importance in your speeches, in your talks, I think that also creates a huge awareness and helps the entire group to take the message forward. And everybody also gets motivated and [inaudible]. I heard that it is also now in the

top five strategic plan of the ICANN and we have dedicated more members looking into it.

I think it would be great to hear from you in one lines or two lines about [inaudible] a great motivation, even for the group, and create a sense that it is very important, top of the agenda. Thank you.

CHERINE CHALABY: Point taken and point noted. Thank you. It's good advice. I will do this next time I speak. Thank you.

NADIRA AL ARAJ: Thank you. Any other comments, questions before our guest leaves?

AJAY DATA: I just want to also introduce Dennis here who is the vice chair now on USG, so this is great to have vice chair of USG sitting here. And we have obviously Sarmad who is now heading the USG on behalf of ICANN. So, I guess you have people around you. [inaudible] is actually a very, very good guy who has done this paper. I follow the mailing list. This paper has come out very nice. Thank you.

NADIRA AL ARAJ: We also encourage the community here to be part of the group who are also pushing the more people they engage and that's part of the engagement, the more affect it will have. Thank you, all. Cherine, any last comment?

CHERINE CHALABY: No. Other than to say I am part of the [inaudible] community, of course, and it's a pleasure for me to be here and participate. Please do invite me.

NADIRA AL ARAJ: [Salim], do you have any questions?

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: No, I don't have any comments. I'm very happy to see the community growing. As a member of this community as well in one hat. The other hat is RIPE NCC hat. The third one is the Internet Society. But at the end, our goal is to put this region on the map and make it part of the global Internet. That I think should be our common region. And such efforts, thank you Tijani, Nadira, all the drafting team are surely going to put the region in this direction.

TIJANI BEN JEMAA: Thank you, [Salim]. I would like to highlight that this kind of activity, this space, is the one who is given the region, the good visibility because we are treating subjects of substance and we are giving the opinion of the Middle East that will be transmitted to the decision-makers.

So, this is how we can impact the decisions. If we are always here only to discuss between ourselves or to do other things, I don't think it is efficient. What is efficient is to address the hot topics and to give the point of view of the community of the Middle East so that the decision will be impacted. Thank you.

NADIRA AL ARAJ: Thank you. We can move down to the second part of the agenda, or maybe if ...

TIJANI BEN JEMAA: Okay, moment. Before moving, I would like to thank again, Cherine Chalaby, the chair of the ICANN board. I cannot say enough thank you because he always answers yes and this time, if you know, his assistant who is standing there told me, no, he cannot come, and after that she and he found a way to come. So, really, really thank you, Cherine.

CHERINE CHALABY: Thank you. It would be easier if it's not on a Monday.

NADIRA AL ARAJ: In front of you, you will find, since we are moving to the second part of the agenda, or the first part, we will be discussing the charter of the space, Middle East space. The charter was drafted by the community members led by Mr. Tijani and distributed to the wider community of the Middle East and we got some feedback on the charter and it's still in its draft in front of you. Mr. Tijani will present it. You are ready to comment. We have a little bit until Mr. Tijani. You can have time to skim through it.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Does everyone have a copy of the charter?

TIJANI BEN JEMAA: Okay.

HADIA ELMINIAWI: I think it's important to say that now. I first would like to thank you all for all your efforts on the charter and on this session, but actually we didn't know that we are actually going to discuss the charter today. I think we've been only handed it now. So, thank you. I know, but I think it wasn't on the agenda, the discussion of the charter. However, I am really happy that we are going to do

that. I'm sure that we are all going to take a look and put our comments now. But it's just a note that it was not on the agenda.

TIJANI BEN JEMAA:

Thank you, Hadia. It was on the agenda and it was discussed on the mailing list, so it is inside the program. Thank you very much, everyone. Thank you, Hadia, for this comment.

So, why we need a charter. In my point of view, for every group, we need to have something, a mission statement, anything, or a charter and I prefer the charter because we need to know first what is the goal. What is the mission? What is it for, this group?

Second, we need to define the working methods, so that inside our work, we will not have problems to decide whether we will do it in this way or in this other way. Who will decide? Who will do, etc.? That's why we need a charter. And for that, we wrote a very simple, very basic, charter but a charter that will permit us to avoid discussion. We need to work on the substance. We don't want to work on the process.

That's why we have to solve the process from the beginning and set up a charter. And this is what we did. The charter had been circulated on the mailing list. We gave – how much we give? I think two weeks or something like this for comments on it. We didn't receive comments. Only one comment and we included it inside

the charter and we put it on the agenda from the beginning and now it is here for your consideration. We may adopt it today if we agree on it. But if we have a lot of change on it, we take all the remarks and issue another version that we will circulate on the mailing list so that we will have a consensus on everything on this charter.

So, charter. We have on it first the goals and the objectives. We said that the primary goal of this space is to address current ICANN hot topics and product a statement expressing the opinion of the Middle East community. That will be addressed to the ICANN board of directors and also to all the other concerned parties. I mean, if the topic is discussed in a working group, we sent our opinion to the working group so that they'd take it into consideration.

Some principles. Very simple. I said it is a very simple charter. So, the principles are openness, diversity, transparency, and bottom-up consensus based decision-making.

The membership. Who is a member of this community of this space? Anyone in the Middle East community, in the Middle East and joint countries community. So, there is no restriction on the membership.

For this space to work, we need a leading team. First, we start with one, but at a certain time, we found that sometimes people

are not responding. So, it may stop if we have only one leading. So, we propose that there is at least two persons leading the space and they are selected among the members of the community according to the practice, to each [inaudible]. It's not the final version, this one.

So, they will be selected according to the decision-making paragraph in this charter. So, [inaudible] be composed of two members with experience in ICANN policies and processes, activities, for two years' term. So, they will be selected for two years.

Each member of the review team can be reselected for a new term of two years, so there is no limit. If you want, it is more formal because you cannot find leaders easily. You have to find people who want to spend time and energy on it.

The review team shall establish the draft working plan and [inaudible] the schedule for each ICANN meeting. It shall also call for topics, announce the selected topic based on the most demanded amongst the proposed topics, call for the drafting team members, announce the composition of the drafting team, establish the agenda for the Middle East space face-to-face session, and send invitation to the guests, preside over the space deliberation online or face-to-face and ensure that the process is bottom-up consensus based.

Also, another, it shall send approved statement to the ICANN board and to the concerned parties. Deliverable, it's clear. It's a statement.

Also, we have the drafting team, how it is selected. It is selected according to the decision-making process that is described at the end of this charter.

What else? The staff will be the Middle East staff. So, we have the vice chair, Baher; and we have Fahad and any other staff member who come to this region.

At the end, decision-making methodology. And this is I think the most important paragraph. Developing and adopting the statement, work plan, and any other report. The Middle East space shall seek to act by consensus. Consensus call should always make best effort to involve all members.

The review team shall be responsible for designating its [inaudible] as having one of the following designation, full consensus or consensus. So, full consensus is clear. There is no objection. Consensus, most people will agree but some will not agree in this case. Even the position of those who don't agree should figure in the final decision. But it will be by consensus [also].

We may be obliged to go to vote but it is something that we will try to never do because vote means one wins and one loses and this is not what we want to have.

So, this is more or less the content of the charter. It is up to you. We distributed it for you. It's up to you to tell us what are your remarks and if you agreed on it or not.

NADIRA AL ARAJ: Just one point. This is not the final version.

TIJANI BEN JEMAA: No.

NADIRA AL ARAJ: We added some items, the review team, because that was the comment we had about how to appoint based on the decision-making process. So, it's just we're referring how the [inaudible] are appointing through. We go to the decision-making and we corrected some of the words there. So, I hope this will get the approval of the community to move ahead to the substance of the workshop.

TIJANI BEN JEMAA: So, short discussion on it, please.

NADIRA AL ARAJ: Yes. Go ahead, Hadia.

HADIA ELMINIAWI: So, thank you, Tijani. I'm sorry, I can see actually the charter on the agenda. I just haven't seen it being ... And I have seen it on the mailing list as well but I haven't seen that we will be discussing it on the mailing list during the Middle East space. Thank you so much for the charter.

I know, Nadira, you just said that with regards to the selection of the members, you said something in that regard, right? Because it says here that the Middle East space selects among its members a leading team according to its practiced approach.

I think that here, in this part, a selection mechanism should be stated. I personally don't think that just saying according to its practiced approach is actually good enough for a charter.

NADIRA AL ARAJ: Exactly, Hadia. That's a correction. That's what we refer to in that. It was already corrected and we will circulate the new version again to the community.

HADIA ELMINIAWI: So, we actually have a selection mechanism stated here or are you referring in the collection to the decision-making methodologies?

NADIRA AL ARAJ: Yes. It's the selection process. We did it also through the decision-making methodology. We changed the first paragraph, then we introduced, based on these decisions, this is a process. That's how the leading team will be appointed or selected.

HADIA ELMINIAWI: Okay. I have another question regard to the drafting team. I suppose that the leadership team is also part of the drafting team or not? I don't know. I'm not clear on that.

NADIRA AL ARAJ: Any member could be. [inaudible].

HADIA ELMINIAWI: I know that any member can be, but you have members applying to be part of a drafting team, right? Then the drafting team is ... You compose a drafting team. So, as a leader, as two leaders, do you by default be part of the drafting team or do you need to apply as the others in order to be a drafting team?

NADIRA AL ARAJ: Good point, Hadia. Thank you. I think we'll take note of that. Appreciate it.

HADIA ELMINIAWI: Thank you.

TIJANI BEN JEMAA: Hadia, what was the issue? What was the point?

HADIA ELMINIAWI: It's not an issue. It's just a clarification. Are the leaders by default part of the drafting team or just ...

TIJANI BEN JEMAA: No. I am sorry. The leading team are not by default on the drafting team. If they want to be on the drafting team, they have to volunteer. That's all.

HADIA ELMINIAWI: The reason I was actually making this comment because the drafting team among themselves choose the penholders. So, it is good to know who is and who is not on the drafting team. Thank you.

TIJANI BEN JEMAA: I will read the final version. The Middle East space selects among its members a [review team] team according to its decision-making methodology included in this charter. Okay? So, the selection would be done according to the decision-making methodology included in this charter. Okay? It is clear now?

HADIA ELMINIAWI: Anyway, now I'm clear that the leading team is not part of the drafting team. Thank you.

NADIRA AL ARAJ: But I think we can also include that as a sentence. Part of the leading team shall ... We can put that. Can you please send us this suggestion as well? Appreciate that. Thank you, Hadia. Yes, there is another ...

[NAVEED]: Actually, I'm confused about when you say that even the leadership team is selected based upon the decision-making people. The decision-making process says that it has ... We try not to have a poll at all, right? So, choosing a leader can have always a poll. You can have volunteers where more than two volunteers come to have chair. And in that case, you cannot say in the charter that we try not to have a poll. This is a strong statement. For drafting statement, you can say that, but choosing a leadership

team I don't think we should go saying that we try to have full consensus on the leadership. We may not have that in the end.

So, I think we need to have a separate process of leadership team. Saying that it just follows the same decision-making process might not work, actually.

NADIRA AL ARAJ:

Thank you, Naveed. I appreciate your comment and I think might well decide this to follow-up through the discussion because we have our penholder is remotely participating. If we have time, we'll come to this. If not, I'm sure we will continue discussing through the e-mail and get approval through the e-mail.

Moving to this part, acknowledging the importance of the universal acceptance and to the region and acknowledging the ongoing work. We are happy to have that expert matter subject addressing the community on the issue and we are welcoming Sarmad Hussain, the director of the IDN program on ICANN, to help us understand better the issue.

SARMAD HUSSAIN:

Thank you. So, I actually had some slides. So, this is a very brief overview of universal acceptance of domain names and e-mail addresses. Next slide, please.

So, the basic scope of universal or the goal of universal acceptance is defined by the statement where it says that people around the world can effectively use domain names and any e-mail address, any domain names, and any e-mail addresses in any application for their personal and business use. So, that's the eventual goal of the universal acceptance initiative. Next slide, please.

Basically, what that means is that there are a few challenges and the challenges arise from the fact that TLD space has expanded over time until about 2009, the top-level domains were largely limited to the two-letter country codes and more conventional or legacy TLDs, as we call them. But since 2009 when the IDN ccTLD fast-track process started and then eventually in 2012 and 2013 when the new gTLD process came through, the top-level domain space expanded significantly. And with these new incoming top-level domains, there were many new kinds of top-level domains which were introduced in the root zone.

So, there were three kinds of changes. First, there were new top-level domain names which were not generally recognized as top-level domain name strings. There were also some of those top-level domains were longer than the more conventional three to four character length.

Then, finally, some of these top-level domain names were in different languages and scripts beyond just the ASCII top-level domains which actually had been around from the start. Next slide, please.

So, again, these are some of the examples of those top-level domain names. We've already talked about some of these changes. In addition, the change which [inaudible] was that with these new top-level domain names, obviously it was also possible to create e-mail addresses using these domain names under these top-level domain names which meant that you could have e-mail addresses which were using domain names which were not familiar in the context of technology. So, especially in the context of internationalized domain names, you could actually have complete e-mail addresses in scripts other than ASCII, beyond ASCII so you could have local language e-mail addresses which obviously needed to be ... Which was, in a way, a new technology which was developed through the process. Next slide, please.

So, the challenge basically was that when these new top-level domains were introduced, many of the applications which were using these top-level domain names, browsers being obviously one of the applications but there are other software applications which use these domain names or process or parse these domain names.

So, many of these applications were not tuned to accepting domain names which were longer than a particular length, like three to four characters. So, when you had these longer domain names, longer strings as top-level domain names and these domain names were submitted to, for example, in a browser or in an application, the application projected those strings or domain names as wrong or did not accept them in the process. So, that was one of the challenges in accepting or universally accepting these domain names and applications.

Of course, the second challenge was that some of the domain names were in local languages and that could be Japanese, that could be Arabic, that could be any of the languages and some of these applications were not accepting those domain names.

Finally, in some of the applications which were inputting e-mail addresses, for example, as user IDs or just generally for communicating e-mails across between two users, those softwares were also not [inaudible] for accepting these new longer and internationalized domain names.

So, there actually has been a challenge of making these domain names and e-mail addresses formed by these domain names to be accepted through the regular applications. And the effort of universal acceptance initiative is to work with variety of stakeholders to make sure that all these different kinds of domain

names are actually equally acceptable across all applications being used obviously by a variety of users. Next slide, please.

So, our eventual challenge of course is to make sure that these applications are working seamlessly in a way that when I go online and I use my e-mail ID in Arabic or my e-mail domain name in Arabic, for example, it would work as if I am actually using a domain name in ASCII or an e-mail address in ASCII. Next slide, please.

So, the Universal Acceptance Steering Group, the universal acceptance community, which has organized itself and has been working towards resolving this problem, broke the problem down into five different technical aspects. So, what they've determined is that to solve the problem, the applications should be able to accept these e-mail addresses and domain names. The application should be able to validate them effectively, store them effectively, process them effectively and display them effectively.

Though all of them are reasonably challenging from an Arabic script point of view, obviously display is also a very unique problem because Arabic domain names and Arabic e-mail addresses are not written from left to right but right to left and that adds another layer of complexity, specifically for Arabic script domain names and e-mail addresses which may actually

not be as significant, for example, for several other scripts. Next slide, please.

So, e-mail address internationalization or internationalized e-mail or e-mail address in local scripts or language, however you want to call it, obviously there are multiple challenges with it. One that we've already talked about, the domain name part of the challenge that the domain names may actually not be accepted. The backend technology may not be able to process internationalized e-mail but I think there is one additional aspect which is specifically relevant to e-mail which is a username part of an e-mail address. And now it is also possible to have usernames which are names before the @ sign in an e-mail address in local languages as well.

The challenge with that is even though domain names themselves in local languages are complex but there actually has been a lot of work on that part. For example, we now know what are the potential security problems or we are working on the potential security problems and solutions around domain names. We know, for example, what are variant labels or variant strings in a domain name but many of those challenges still remain unaddressed for the local part of the username part of the e-mail address. So, there are some additional complexities obviously which need to be addressed in addition for e-mail addresses. Next slide, please.

So, especially talking about e-mail addresses, there's actually, as I mentioned earlier, and I think we'll come back to that later in the discussion as well, that there's a very active universal acceptance steering group community within ICANN. They have actually been working and made significant contributions over the last three to four years now and have defined the problem and are now obviously working towards resolving the issues which have actually been identified.

Just as an example, you can see that they have actually ... Their website is usg.tech and they, for example, developed a tool which is available on this website. The URL is given here. What you can do is go on this site and enter your e-mail address and see. What it does is it checks whether the domain server you are using which you are using for your e-mail address, whether that is compliant with internationalized e-mail standards or not. So, you can actually check it as we speak and see whether at the backend your mail server supports EI. If it supports EI, what that means is that if my e-mail address is in Arabic and I send you an e-mail, whether you would receive that e-mail or not. Or if my e-mail address is in Arabic, can I even send that e-mail through my mail server or not. So, this actually does that basic check and tells you whether the mail server you're using is EI compliant or not. Next slide, please.

So, obviously, there are multiple reasons we would want to support domain names and e-mail addresses in local script and languages. It allows us to communicate effectively in our languages. It allows us to obviously retain our cultural identity as a citizen of Internet Society, in a way.

The interesting thing is universal acceptance is not a very technically significant problem to solve. It's more of an awareness challenge where if people know how to address the technical – the technical people know how to address it, they can work in the solution reasonably well.

It's mostly that there is not enough knowledge in the community at this time of what the challenge is and I think that's a communication challenge which we face which we obviously need to address to reach to people. I guess all of us in that context can play our part. Next slide, please.

So, the universal acceptance steering group obviously currently contains multiple organizations. Almost 200 organizations are represented in the general list with many organizations from the Middle East region as well. There are some examples. Next slide, please.

So, it's a list of how you can get involved at different levels. I will not start from the top. I'll start from the bottom and I'll say please get involved with the USG. Sign up for the mailing list and become

– not just sign up. Start contributing and actually if you want to take more ownership, volunteer for the UA ambassadorship program which allows you to do more active outreach within your community. Thank you.

NADIRA AL ARAJ:

Thank you, Sarmad. I appreciate [inaudible] from the community to [inaudible] the question to Sarmad to have the expert's point of view and then open the discuss, open Q&A, [inaudible] appreciating the importance of the time of our honorable guests here. Thank you, Sarmad, again.

Welcoming Mr. Mohan. He is one of the pillars of ICANN, I can say. We are happy that he made it to us and he is also currently the chair of universal acceptance steering committee. The floor is yours.

RAM MOHAN:

Thank you so much. I really appreciate the opportunity to come here. I'm Ram and I helped found and start the universal acceptance steering group. Before actually talking about what it does or things that Sarmad has said, I just want to tell you a story of how this all started for me because I didn't know anything about universal acceptance when this all started.

But in 2001 I was charged with starting up and running a new top-level domain. It was the first new top-level domain or gTLD. After com, net, org, etc., there is dot-info. It's an ASCII. It's a four-letter name. It should just work.

But believe me, for the first six or seven months, my inbox was flooded. Not my afillias.info inbox, but my afillias.com inbox was flooded with e-mails from people who had bought domain names in dot-info and who were finding that they could not type in a dot-info name in a browser. They could not actually use a dot-info. At that time, Yahoo messenger was a dominant messenger platform, and if you wanted to register for an account on Yahoo messenger, it needed an e-mail address. If you typed in – in my case, I typed in ram.mohan.info, it popped back with a question that said, “Are you sure this is the right e-mail address?” And then when I tried to work on it a little bit later, it came back with another question. Are you sure you didn't mean ram@mohan.info.com?

That really is, in a nutshell, the fundamental problem that we all face. It started with ASCII, and then a few years later, there were internationalized domain names and then of course now we are in a situation where we have names that work right to left, left to right, e-mail addresses. There's a whole bunch of things.

But fundamental to all of this is if you type in a name, an address, in a browser, will it just work if it is a valid address? Will it just work? As Sarmad was saying, if you have an e-mail that is a valid e-mail, technically correct, something that is say written in Arabic or something that is, say, written in Farsi and you send it out and your system is capable of sending it out, will it actually go across the Internet and arrive on the other side?

Here is something even more simple. We all use social media of some sort or the other. There are some people who use WhatsApp, some people who use Facebook, Twitter, etc. Or people use Microsoft Word and type things in.

Now, you're all used to a very simple thing. When you start typing in an e-mail address, you type in [name@domainname.tld](#), the moment you hit a space, you'll get a blue line underneath it. It's automatic.

Same thing with a URL. If you type in [www.something.something](#), in most of these applications, it will automatically get underlined and become a hyperlink. You think this is a common experience, except if you have a new TLD, if you have an IDN TLD, if you have an e-mail address that is internationalized, the experience is not a common experience. That is really the problem that the universal acceptance steering group was founded that I helped create to make happen. It's community-driven. It's really trying to

solve a problem that is so obvious and so simple to explain and so difficult to actually get the right people to do something about it.

Because when we go and we talk to a CIO or we go and talk to a director of IT at a company and we tell them about this problem, they shrug their shoulders and say, “I’m using a dot-com.” Or they shrug their shoulders and say, “It’ll happen when it gets upgraded.” Much worse than that is you go and talk to a developer and the developer says, “But I did everything right. I’m using PURL or I’m using Java as a programming language and I’m just using the library that comes standard with it.” And those languages, they have little pieces of code embedded in them that are ancient, that go back 30 years or 25 years and they have silly things in there like a valid e-mail address is only left to right, or a valid e-mail address cannot have in the actual name – the part before the @ - it must only be ASCII. Or a top-level domain can only be two or three characters long.

Now, come on. New top-level domains is not new in 2011, [inaudible] in 2001. So, that really is what the universal acceptance steering group sets out to do.

So, as Sarmad was saying, he was talking about the UASG community. We are all that community, because in the region that we are in and the languages that we speak, in the scripts that

we use every day, the DNS is often not a part of it. The applications that we use are often not a part of it.

So, your help is needed not only in being a part of the community, joining the discussion list and participating, but also really helping the UASG get some clues as to who to talk to, because honestly, if you ask me if we had to say, “Who do we talk to in Jordan to go look at how to make sure that the applications that are there are actually working correctly?” or, “Who do we talk to in the region that has the internationalization piece in Chrome or in Mozilla or something like that?” I don’t know that we have all the answers, but you have the answers. You have the contacts and you have the ideas.

So, I think that really is the promise of universal acceptance and the universal acceptance steering group. We call it a steering group, but it really is driven by the community, run by the community for our community because the end of the day, only 37% of the world actually speaks English. We know that.

But it’s kind of crazy that the DNS is kind of assuming that it should not only originally be in ASCII but it should remain in ASCII going forward. That’s not what the vision for our generation should be. It certainly should not be the vision for our children’s generation as well.

So, I think at a higher level, what we have to do with universal acceptance is to break through and get to the decision-makers, get to the people who are able ... And this is not just in companies. It should also be, I think, at policy makers. Would it not be nice if, in a government procurement, there be a little line that says if your solution is universal acceptance, is UA ready, you will get extra points. That’s an incentive that might prompt an organization that is bidding for a large contract to say, “Let me see what it takes to be UA ready,” and then they look at it and say, “It’s actually just a bug fix.” And I can go solve that.

So, with that, it’s been just for me a really wonderful experience getting all of this going. I have just a special love for this region. In 2006-2007, I helped start up the Arabic Script IDN Working Group. Several of you were actually part of that and that was the first time that we actually got to harmonization across the entire script. It was not only from the Arabic language, but I think it was 12-13 different languages including languages in Africa that use the Arabic script. They are actually not Arabic, but they use the Arabic script to represent them – [inaudible] in Malaysia, etc. So, a lot of love in my heart for what all of you experience and it’s been just a wonderful ride.

I’ve been honored to be selected by the community to chair the universal acceptance steering group after having started it. But I’m also very pleased to let you know that I will step down in just

a couple of days from that chair role. We just concluded elections today inside of the community. Ajay Data has been selected as the next chair of the universal acceptance steering group. So, I think it's in good hands.

The problem is simple. The solutions are not as simple. We really need your help to spread the word, and B, help us make the connection so that we can together solve the problems. Thanks, Nadira.

NADIRA AL ARAJ:

Thank you. I wish you were sitting next to [inaudible] but I could feel the energy flowing and I hope he will carry the message, his successor will carry the message forward as well. I also thank you so much. It's inspiring. It's important for us also as a community to understand that when there is a will, there is a way and hope to work together to make it happen. I appreciate that. Thank you. [inaudible] who already moved beyond our start have the experience and he can inspire us for experience, Mr. Akinori, ICANN board member. You're welcome.

AKINORI MAEMURA:

Thank you very much. Very nice to see you. Maybe many people don't know my face and name. I can [remind you]. I am one of the board members of ICANN. I am from Japan, so my mother tongue

is Japanese. In that case, I am the beneficiary of the IDN. So, that's the reason why I am now serving in the board as the IDN Working Group chair, after Mohan passed it to me.

Universal acceptance steering group is fantastic activity, which is longstanding which is a huge amount of momentum to use that universal acceptance activity forward. I only can admire the achievement and activity, the amount of activity itself. I appreciate that, Ram.

As Ram said, I had some experience, similar experience, in Japan. Japanese community actually was one of the drivers of the international domain name. Japanese community did the same engagement effort when we were employing the IDN to the second level at the time.

We had not marginal problem at the time to have [inaudible] to apply and then [inaudible] to the IDN. So, without that, we don't have any possibility. We didn't have any possibility to have the IDN. It's being used in [inaudible], of course the DNS system.

So, such tremendous effort. Based on such tremendous effort, we are now doing the UASG IDN activity in the ICANN community.

I have some additional expectation to the Middle East community because many of you are using Arabic as the script and the language. That was my understanding. Many people are relying

on the Arabic script and language. That may be [inaudible] issue, but the issue [can be challenged. Challenge can be chance, I mean.]

So, what I expect is the Middle East community is one of the potential leaders for the universal acceptance board perspective to engage the IT forums and community to help them adapt it to universal acceptance. If you are successfully [inaudible] the IDN base of the IT forum, then that could be the role model of the other regions and other scripts. So, that's one of the expectations, from my point of view.

The second thing is I am now the chair of the board working group for the IDN which is ... Actually, that is not the current name. The current name is the IDN Universal Acceptance Working Group. Right now, the ICANN Organization with the ICANN board comes to one big milestone that we are now ... The board is ratifying this week. The variant management scheme of the top-level domain names as a recommendation which is to fed to the ccNSO and the GNSO process.

So, this is making a very big milestone for that for the entire IDN activity. One will say [inaudible] we are now having the IDN cocktail to [inaudible]. So, that is [inaudible] Wednesday. Please do come.

Then, why we are now renaming the IDN Working Group to the IDN Universal Acceptance Working Group is. One of the things is we are now ... One item is [inaudible] completed. [inaudible] we need to put more effort on universal acceptance.

So, in that [inaudible] still here thinking about what kind of aspect we can be energized and we can be put more focus on to the universal acceptance activity, but we are now thinking about that. So, you will have some additional information – the direction from the ICANN Organization and the ICANN board, so please expect that. And if you have any input for this universal acceptance thing, I as the chair of the IDN UA Working Group is [inaudible] contact. As RALOs, of course, you have the quite familiar face of Ram Mohan who will be keeping active in the UASG, right?

RAM MOHAN: I expect to, yes.

AKINORI MAEMURA: Yes. UASG people, we have the ambassador and the new [inaudible] for the assumption of the new chair. He is a real energetic guy who can [inaudible] a lot of things. So, please, contact us to tell your wants for the universal acceptance. Then it

would be really helpful for us to craft the new activity for the universal acceptance. Thank you very much.

NADIRA AL ARAJ: Thank you. We are depending on you for the coming tasks. Now I will make the floor open for questions for our visitors here. So, if you have anything before moving to the statement. Go ahead, Tijani.

TIJANI BEN JEMAA: Thank you very much. Akinori, you changed the name to IDN Universal Acceptance. That means that you are not addressing the other aspects of the universal acceptance. Shall I understand that all is solved?

AKINORI MAEMURA: Yes. It is not meaning universal acceptance for IDN only. IDN and universal acceptance. It's a bit larger. We are now expanding our view. Not only IDN. That's a slightly tricky point [inaudible] this working group. You made a very huge point.

TIJANI BEN JEMAA: Another question. Why it is steering committee? What you are steering?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: So, we called it the steering group, Tijani, because at the start ... It started at an ICANN meeting where I was speaking about the problems, especially with all these new TLDs and IDN ccTLDs and IDN TLDs.

So, we got together. We actually were like a little coffee, one of these tall coffee tables and we just huddled around it, about 10-15 of us, and what became very clear from the various community members was they said we have energy. We want to do a lot of things. But it needed some structure.

So, my thought was that this shouldn't be a working group or a committee or task force or something like that. I thought that what we really should do is we should help steer the efforts. The efforts really belong to the community. The work has to be done in the community, but this is a group that helps steer that effort. That's why it's called the steering group.

NADIRA AL ARAJ: May I ask you, because we want to steer us because there is ... The group is a taskforce on Arabic script IDN. What do you advise them to do, to change maybe on ...

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Thank you. There are a couple of things. One of the really wonderful things that has happened in just the last couple of

years' time has been the work that you have done on getting to the LGR for the Arabic script. That is amazingly important work, brilliant work, because without that, you would really limit yourself on representation not only at the top level of the root, but the general [inaudible] is that what the integration panel comes up with and what does LGR panel comes up with, they will likely be automatically accepted and adopted by every registry in the world.

So, it actually has an impact not only on the top level but most likely, in my opinion, it will have an impact at the second level, at every level.

So, the work that that group is doing is important now. Languages evolve and you find that – and technology evolves at the same time. Both of them are happening at the same time.

So, one of the things for the taskforce to do is to keep track of changes saying Unicode or changes on the IDN guidelines that Akinori was talking about and to make sure that your script and your way of representing your languages online don't get negatively affected because of some technical rule created by somebody who actually doesn't understand Arabic script or the issues that have to do with the languages. So, that's probably the number one thing to do. It's a caution type of thing.

On UASG, on universal acceptance in particular, I think the biggest thing that the taskforce can do is to not only spread the word, but to provide connection and contacts into organizations and provide some help in how to get to developers, how to get to policy makers and governments, to actually inform them.

There are two things here. One is make them aware. And the second is actually find a way to motivate them to partner up, to change the status quo.

The reality – and this is published data – in the four years that I have been chair, the universal acceptance steering group has set a budget of over a million dollars and in each of the years has spent ... In some years, it has spent only 10% of that. The reason for that is because the work has to be justified, and if you want to spread awareness it has to be linked with outcome.

But in your region, there is an opportunity to take even small amounts of money to be able to go spread some awareness of universal acceptance and get to maybe organize a hackathon, maybe go and be part of developer community events in the region. Maybe what we can do together is to say there is an event on how the cloud is being used in the Middle East region. Maybe we ought to work together and say let's get a booth there and let's see if we can get somebody to come and speak and explain what universal acceptance is. And if getting a booth is going to cost, I

don't know, \$5000, \$10,000 or whatever, that is available. But that partnership is what has to be done.

NADIRA AL ARAJ: Great advice. In fact, our penholder, he is doing an awareness on the universal acceptance in Iraq and he will be with us online shortly to present his draft. But still, before moving to him, any other input? Can you introduce your name as well?

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Hi, my name is [inaudible]. It's amazing project. I wish to see it really implemented, see more Arabic script TLDs. But while I was listening to the presentation discussions, I was wondering what the influence of this project on accessibility by end users.

So, let's say if there's a website using Arabic script as a TLD and there's someone who doesn't know Arabic. Someone doesn't have a keyboard in Arabic. How would he or she access this website with that? Yes, it would make Arabic more popular, but would influence [inaudible] certain website or e-mail. What do you think of that? Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Thank you. Excellent question. It used to be maybe five, ten years ago that you actually went to a browser or you actually went

somewhere and you typed an actual address in. But I will make a guess that for most of you here in the audience, 85% of the time you're clicking on a link that either somebody sent you or you're clicking on a link that you saw on a site somewhere or an advertisement or something in Google or something like that. So, it's likely that you actually don't have to type it in.

Now, the other big advancement that has happened that I think is going to be transformational in allowing people to use our own languages online is the advent of not only mobile phones but smart speakers and voice input, because with voice input, you don't need to know how to actually type something in. If I know that a particular website is a particular name, I just have to say go there or buy something from that site. It can be in Arabic. It doesn't really matter.

There are some languages where speakers may have a problem understanding it. But for the most part, I think that problem is getting slowly smaller in scope. So, I think that's a combination.

The flip side of it is that people click on links in e-mail and the unfortunate fact is that Arabic script in particular and Chinese script as well, are often used for things like phishing campaigns in spam and things like that that happen, especially in phishing campaigns because people look at those characters and if you're

only used to English, you kind of just ignore that other part of it. You click on it and then you have a problem.

NADIRA AL ARAJ: Thank you, on [inaudible]. I will move fast because our time is almost over. I will not go through the statement. I will go through the recommendation directly and [inaudible] start addressing the issue.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Thank you. I am here from Iraq. We have been making good progress in the universal acceptance project. We recommend [inaudible] ICANN. The [inaudible] ICANN developed universal acceptance issues [inaudible] inventory from different scripts that affect the project such as the issues related to right to left languages, old domain names including the [inaudible] language, [inaudible] between different scripts within the same domain name. Attacks – for example, homograph attacks. [inaudible] ICANN guides the application program and interfaces. It has [inaudible] the open source [inaudible].

NADIRA AL ARAJ: We lost him. We have a back-up plan by the way. We have one of the team, drafting team, is here and until [inaudible] online again, we have—

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: So, we have the next point that is guide the application programming interface, API [inaudible] especially the open source community to make it generic for all available language scripts concerning [inaudible] languages.

The next recommendations by the community statement is encouraging all the stakeholders, particularly coordinate efforts with the private sector, technical [inaudible] and governments to get their first step towards universal acceptance readiness by developing repository systems and ...

Then, we have these bullet points identifying the applications that should be universal acceptance ready. Next is modifying the current systems to be UA ready, requiring that new developed applications to be UA ready and providing guidelines and toolkits for how to make applications UA ready.

Then, we have the next point. Pave the way to develop indicators to measure how much of the online environment is ready to handle the next billion Internet users as well as finding the best use of internationalized domain names and e-mail address internationalizations.

Then, we have enabling EI support and the e-mail servers making a consistent environment starting by accessing local content with

local domain names and send and receive e-mails using local e-mail addresses, developing a case study for a role model of countries which did the best use of IDNs and EAs to follow what they did to make it happen.

Then you have conduct reasonable focus survey on how to promote more IDNs, EAs, and universal acceptance inside the area and do some analysis about their market, maybe through SWOT analysis, etc.

Push more resources to get label generation rules to LGR to [inaudible] support the community and the challenges of [inaudible] volunteers. Some countries do not have representatives at the IDN community. Security challenges, security in Arabic domains. Not allowing insecure unsafe code points that may affect the stability of the registry domain space. For example, the control code points, combining [inaudible], etc.

Make guideline and procedure on how the coordination will be there between the universal acceptance project, actors like UASG and other IDN communities such as taskforce on Arabic IDNs [inaudible]. One main coordination group which has representatives from such groups that will handle all these guidelines with other sub-coordination groups.

Allocate a budget to the community during an effort to make this multi-lingual using the internationalized domain name

framework for more engagement conducting more outreach in specific areas of universal acceptance, including e-mail providers, domain providers, domain name providers, software providers including database, web, desktop, Android, iOS, etc. and then open source providers, software providers.

[inaudible] the linguistic diversity in the regional markets and work with the governments, registries, registrars, etc., to potentially be more beneficial in raising awareness about universal acceptance within the regional community.

So, these were the recommendations in the statements that were actually drafted with the great support and help of Abdul [inaudible]. Thank you,

NADIRA AL ARAJ:

Thank you. Hadia? We start I think now the discussion of the statement.

HADIA ELMINIAWI:

Being aware of the time, I'll be quite quick. I think the statement came out very well and it's pretty good. But according to the UNESCO report on IDNs, IDNs are under-performing due to poor user experiences and due to poor user awareness.

So, universal acceptance is actually about the technical aspect and the human aspect. The statement actually has handled the technical aspect very well and I guess the only thing that I believe we need to add to it is the human aspect, is the Internet users' awareness.

So, I suggest adding a bullet that says maybe ICANN launches a universal acceptance awareness program or something along these lines. Thank you.

NADIRA AL ARAJ:

That's a good idea. We appreciate you adding it and I think [inaudible] is also taking note of it. Go ahead, Ajay.

AJAY DATA:

I think it's wonderfully done. We are already on [inaudible]. I think if you want to add somewhere about encouragement to the community to join UASG mailing list. That is something which you can add there because that is a repository of the [inaudible] and a lot of the discussions have been on usg.tech.

And one thing which, if you want to add this somewhere, is because it is not only – as Ram said, it is only half or one-third of the world which knows English. So, those people who do not know English, how do you bring them online? How do you bring them access to the Internet?

So, this is also answers the questions of [inaudible] Arabic domain. It is not just the person who knows English. It is about the person who does not know English. He can't even type any domain today.

So, there's 75% of the problem which we face today with ASCII domains, if you see it that way. The idea is if you have Arabic domain now, the entire Arabic population will be able to come online and access to their preferred content. I think these are the two points. Thank you.

NADIRA AL ARAJ:

Well taken, Ajay. I think that will be added. I'm not sure about ... There is some reservation from Tijani. Abdul [inaudible] is online. He wants to provide his comment.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE:

Yes. Thank you, Nadira. I want to [inaudible] Hadia. I would like to say [inaudible] universal acceptance or want to bring more to IDNs or want to bring more to EIs. It means that we have to encourage the people to use these IDNs and EIs and [inaudible] domain. How come this [inaudible] without having an environment that is compliant with these IDNs and [inaudible]?

So, we'll have to promote the concept of universal acceptance stating from developers and as a ecosystem and it will be the

registrant, the users, the end user in order to use IDNs and [inaudible] have this ASCII Domain names and ASCII e-mail address for accessing his [inaudible]. Thank you.

NADIA AL ARAJ:

Thank you. What I can see is that our statement, it needs still some work. Because our time is over for this session, what I'm suggesting for the community ... It is a draft. To continue discussing and in a weeks' time, we might forward it again to Ajay, Ram, and Akinori. Thank you, all, and we are happy—

TIJANI BEN JEMAA:

Thank you very much. Thank you for being with us. I would like to thank especially Sarmad and Ram Mohan and also Akinori who just left. They really made an effort to come. All had time constraints but all made them free to come here, as well as Cherine. So, we are really lucky because we are supported. So, it is all about us. We have to work and we may impact the decision.

Those statements are written to be sent to the board and to the concerned party, the decision-making party. So, we're not putting it ... We encourage the community. It is not addressed to the community. It is addressed to the decision-makers. That's why we try to make it more ... Focus it on what we may say to influence the decision. Thank you very much.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Thank you very much, Tijani, and I appreciate the invitation to come here. This statement ... I was just sharing with Nadira [inaudible]. This is really well-crafted statement already. One suggestion that I have, particularly given the focus on universal acceptance and IDNs at this meeting – because it’s kind of a pivotal meeting for IDNs, because for the first time since 2010, the board is on its way to allowing variant TLDs to be opened up, right? So, that’s a significant. It’s a historical milestone that is happening at this meeting.

One thought that I have is perhaps to take a much shorter summary of the principles that you have here and to have someone appropriate from your group to come in front of the – in the public forum on Thursday and to make that as an intervention because, as a former board member, I will share with you that a statement that comes from a community and especially a statement that is not simply criticizing the organization but is actually encouraging and saying, “We have ideas. You need to help us.” It will have a tremendously positive impact, so I encourage you to do that. I’m happy to help in any way.

TIJANI BEN JEMAA: Thank you very much, again. I would like to thank our staff.

NADIA AL ARAJ: I second Ram’s suggestion. Maybe we can ... I move to agree, have a rough consensus on the draft as is, so somebody can present it on Thursday. It's a very good idea.

TIJANI BEN JEMAA: So, I’d like to thank our staff, all our staff, and also the interpreters. We are out of time and they are still with us. So, thank you, all. Bye-bye.

[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]