

**Transcription ICANN Singapore
Discussion with CEO
Sunday 08 February 2015**

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Volker Greimann: Thank you. With this I would like to welcome Fadi, our CEO, to this - to the calls. Thank you for making the time to come speak to us. I think you have been provided with a list of topics. But (Jonathan), who is still held up at the GAC, said he would be trying to come over as soon as possible but we should to ahead right away so not to intrude on your time too much.

The first topic that we had hoped you would be able to talk to us was the topic of the workload, the community and perspective of volunteer burnout, which was a topic that you had indicated to us at the previous session that would be very high on your list of topics to address.

This has been already picked up with the SO/AC leadership forum. They are also high interest topic discussions on Monday scheduled for this topic. It has been noted that the question remains of the motivation of volunteers for whom domain names are not an income source, i.e., people that are truly here as volunteers because they're interested in the topic, which may have a different motivation or less incentive to participate as - to be less engaged or more engaged, whatever the interest might be.

But anyway, they have probably different difficulties of making this time available for the workload that ICANN requires of them, which can be considerable.

Fadi Chehade: Yes. Thank you and good morning to all of you in Singapore. The subject of volunteerism at ICANN is actually for me an extremely uplifting subject because it really is what makes us an incredible community, a very different community.

And we do put time. I want to start not to be soft or emotional about this because we really need to move on to how do we address the fact there is burnout and there is difficulty.

But just in the last few months with the amazing amount of work we've had on transition and accountability, the hundreds of people who have put time - one in particular that I won't name who had a big role in the transition and accountability work and shows up at meetings having dealt with some pretty tough personal tragedies without even mentioning that he has; just carrying on, getting his work done.

I've been very moved by that gentleman's story. And it just shows that we have commitment in this community; just incredible commitment. And frankly, it's what drives other people in other communities crazy. Because we just keep showing up and keep putting the time and keep volunteering and it's remarkable.

So frankly a big hand to our volunteers and deep respect for who they are. I get paid to do this. Most people here don't get paid directly to do this. And it's a myth that oh, my company sends me therefore I'm just putting company time here. The reality is your job stays and most of us have two jobs. And ICANN is a full time job for many of us around this table. I know that it's occupying a lot of your time.

That is not sustainable. That's a different issue. Now we're getting into how do you sustain this. You know, how do you keep doing this? How do you make sure we keep having quality people around the table when they have day jobs? So it's not easy.

So we have taken this issue at heart. We met with SO/AC leaders. They made it a top three priority for us to work on with them. I must say we had a very productive session on this issue - when was this (Jonathan), two days ago, something like that.

We had a very productive session where we discussed some practical things we can do. And there are practical things we can do and we should be doing that frankly we had not paid attention to. So the topic is of central focus to me right now.

I will tell you a couple of things I did after the community raised that issue with me in Los Angeles. Was in Los - Los Angeles I think. Yes. The first thing I did is I went back inside ICANN and I said, "Why aren't we - why did I need to wait till Alan Greenberg was screaming at me that the tools are not working for working groups?"

I said to my team, "Why did it take us getting to this point for people to say we just don't even have basic tools to address issues and we're using very old technology sometimes." And our staff is very busy - not our staff, pardon me, our volunteers are very busy with administrative things that they shouldn't be.

So the first thing I did and not so quietly - I think I sent the SO/AC leaders a letter that I did that but I actually took every leader and executive at ICANN who is doing a function that faces the community and I now pulled them all into a single group.

So that was a major (quite a tree org) we did in the last few months where (Sally), (David), the people who run our meetings, the people who run all the

tools and Web sites for the community, all of these folks have now been pulled into a single group. And we're calling this the Community Group. Right.

The group that it's focused on, how do we serve the community better? How do we provide better tools for them? How do we provide better information for them? How do we make it easier for them to volunteer and give time? So that's been done already.

Also two days ago when I met with the SO/AC leaders, we discussed a number of practical things we could be doing. We did the survey for example and we found out that most people who are brought into the community either through your efforts or the GSE efforts or whatever we do don't stick around, don't become working volunteers.

The highest reason we found out that people did stay is that they had a mentor. And we found out that they found the mentor on their own. In other words, a new person here maybe in the room, you know, hears us speak, comes up to I don't know, (Edward) and says (Edward), can you help me out because I like what you said.

And those who found that path ended up being people who stayed and worked. So we thought, okay, why don't we formalize this program. Why are we just counting on, you know, it happening in a random way?

So we - that's an example of multiple things. I have a breakfast in the morning on Tuesday with all the prior - those who served on the Board of ICANN in the past. And every time I meet these guys at an ICANN meeting, their biggest question is what can we do. Can you give us something to do?

So well, I'm going to show up this Tuesday and tell them would you like to be part of a formal mentor program where as a new member comes into the GNSO; at least they have the option to say okay, I'd like to work with this person to learn the ropes of the community.

And I don't know how this whole program will unfold. I'm not designing it on the fly. But I'm giving you an example of how we're - and one second example and I stop on this.

I got very frustrated when I heard the community's description of how working groups are coordinated. And I said to myself - I mean this is when I started something called RosettaNet in the late 90s. We already had very good tools for working group management; managed documents - at the time it was using Lotus Notes.

But since then there are a lot of tools to do this. I challenged my team. So they found a tool (Kavi) and they already deployed it inside our policy team to test it. And the initial feedback is pretty positive about it.

And I'm pushing very hard that we invest in this tool and have the community test it and see if it's a tool that could be useful to them so we can start at least taking a lot of the administrative burden using better tools to do it. That's just examples of that. But I'm - that issue is now on top of my mind and thanks to you.

(Jonathan): Thanks Fadi. I've picked up the mic. Slightly my surprise that I (unintelligible) this - so I didn't get to say hello.

Fadi Chehade: Hi.

(Jonathan): I was - just so people are clear, I was with the GAC. They were talking about the transition work and so I was unable to leave. Didn't look good to leave before. So apologies Fadi that I wasn't here to receive you.

Fadi Chehade: (Unintelligible).

(Jonathan): Thank you. So we put a few questions across. I think the second set of us having - hang on. Let's just see if there are any - are there any comments or questions or further input in and around that first set of topics? Please come up to the microphone and make sure to announce yourself for the recording. Thank you.

Stephane Van Gelder: Hi. Stephane Van Gelder speaking. Hi everyone. Hi Fadi. I think the problem of volunteer burnout has not been addressed in your response and I'm sure it's something that's complicated and can't be answered in a single sentence or in five minutes.

But it is a problem that everyone in this room and everyone that's working around ICANN has been grappling with for years. I don't have a solution but it is a problem that I think really is one of a threat to ICANN sustainability.

And I'll give you just one example. When we, the NonCom go out and try and recruit people, we first of all explain what ICANN is and then we explain what the workload is. And at that point people tend to switch off or just simply leave the room.

So I'm sure everyone here is faced with the same problem and, you know, getting the situation where people - it's always the same people doing the work, which is even more of a burden on them because no one else will pick up the work.

So no solution I'm afraid but I did want to flag that as a specific concern for everybody in this community as, you know, you've got an army of ICANN staff who are paid doing a lot of very, very good work. But just throwing it at the community and the expression's been used before, (de-dosing) the community who simply can't cope with all this material coming at them. So I think we really have to flag this as a major issue and try and deal with it. Thanks.

(Jonathan): Thanks Stephane. (James).

(James): Thanks (Jonathan). (James) for the transcript. Thanks Fadi. So I'm encouraged to hear you addressing this issue. Volunteer burnout is real. The workload is becoming a problem because of the quantity increases and the quality I think inversely starts to suffer simply just because there's not enough hours in the week to spend on teleconferences and still actually be ready for the next meeting.

But I actually want to do something a little unusual for these sessions and instead of, you know, take you and your staff to task on this is turn it around and say I think that some of that burden falls to us; GNSO particularly as a policy management body I think needs to do a better job of understanding what its capacity for work is and understanding when these new initiatives come to us do we have the ability to say no or do we have the ability to say not now because there's just no more room on the plate.

And that's something I think that we don't do a good job necessarily. You know that we have an input and we have an output and we just kind of keep moving right along here without really recognition that things are piling up on the shipping docs there.

So that's something I think that - I'm encouraged to hear your efforts on this and meeting with your staff and then circling the wagons within the community and SO/AC leadership. But I think that we need to do more here, you know, at the SO/AC level to be more cognizant of what we're putting onto the queue when in terms of new initiatives.

Particularly not just what we got on our plates now but I think yesterday in particular when we saw what's coming down the pipeline.

Fadi Chehade: And this address both you comment (James) and Stephane's comment. Later you will ask me what things we didn't do well last year or we did well. One of

the things we did not do well last year -- I take the blame for that -- is we didn't work with you to (modulate) the pipeline of work. Right.

So Stephane is right. The - I am sorry. My staff is here so don't get upset with me. But the reality is we just - there was stuff coming down barreling at us and we would just, you know, of course we're no longer under 20 right now - close to 300 people.

So, you know, we can maybe absorb more capacity but we just kind of pass it down the pike. Just like a supply chain. But the problem is that you had capacity in one place.

So one of the important things we did with you - with the SO/AC leaders, which I'm very focused on right now and we talked about it also two days ago, is to (prioritize things). Is to not just have the staff in a silo do its work and then to actually do some prioritization.

And we agreed for example two days ago that we will have each community kind of come back to me saying these are the top five things we think we should be working on this year.

The people who do this marvelously and have done for the last two years and maybe we can learn some lessons from them are the SSAC. They literally say we have a capacity for seven, maximum eight things that we can write about. And here are the seven we're doing this year. If you don't like them, tell us now.

I think we kind of need to replicate that and then to have a mechanism amongst us to cooperate on what is that list and decide how we're going to go about it. We have not done this in the past.

So we'll do what we can. And Stephane, there is no silver bullet. You know that. If there was one, you know, many of us would have found it years ago.

But what there is, is potentially five, six, seven little things that start nipping at the problem. Right. The mentor program is an idea.

The idea that we prioritize together so we know our capacities and not surprise each other with just dumps of work may help a little bit. And we have five, six of these that we will address in the - vigorously in the weeks and months ahead.

(Jonathan): Thanks Fadi. Probably a couple of remarks I would make. It's just that there are incremental small improvements that could be made and some have been made with the assistance of staff. So there's a series of improvements going on in the GNSO and one of them is, you know, we get additional staff help. There's always a fine balance to be struck there because there's sensitivity about handing things over to staff and it not being community run or lead.

But, you know, for example, initial draft of a charter with the opportunity to get that back in the working group. I'd encourage everyone to participate in that high interest session on Monday and check, you know, the value and validity of what's being proposed and what's being done. So that would be great.

Fadi Chehade: Sorry (Jonathan). I have a question to all of you about this so we can make this frankly productive from a dialog standpoint. One of the leaders in the community -- I don't see her here; I think she's in another meeting with the Board -- made a comment two days ago and I want that (committed) to her because it was Chatham House. But I'll just mention the comment.

That we are getting to the point, as Stephane said, where the burnout is real and the ability of the volunteers to do - to carry a lot of the load is becoming harder.

And she came up with a suggestion that she left on the table -- that we should discuss in front of the whole community at the high interest session --

of finding a way where (David)'s team is expanding what they do to do more what I would call research for the community to do more writing, to do more preparatory work.

And how do we do that without the community feeling that the staff, you know, are we crossing a line where the community feels, you know, this is uncomfortable; that we should be doing this.

But we need to find a solution. The GAC found the solution, right. What did they do? They asked us to bring experts to help them do that or to have our staff do that but our staff would have to sign certain non-disclosure agreements that create Chinese walls for them as they participate with the community on certain things.

So we need to be creative. But I need to hear from you whether there is an openness for that. And if there is, time to speak now because the budgeting season is upon us. And if I need to give (David) one, two, three, four, five extra people who have the ability to help you with more substantive rather than just organizational matters, I need to know now. But that signal would be helpful (Jonathan).

(Jonathan): Okay. So I've got Chuck at the microphone and then (Brett).

Chuck Gomes: Absolutely Fadi. This is Chuck Gomes from VeriSign as co-Chair of the Policy and Implementation Working Group. J. Scott's the other - J. Scott Evans is the other co-Chair. And we would not have produced a recommendations report last month if it wasn't for (David)'s team and also the GDD team.

Tremendous support there. And so it's already happening. To the extent we can do more of that, let's do it because it's been just invaluable resources -- I'm looking at Marika here -- to us in the Policy and Implementation Working Group, so.

(Brett): (I'm going) to go ahead? Thanks. You know, the policy processes take so long because there are so many different views around the table. I mean I - we wouldn't be burdened if everyone agreed with me all the time. The policy processes would move very quickly.

And I say that silly thing because we've never actually had a mechanism for brokering compromise. And that's a lot of what the policy process is. And, you know, I come from a legal background and oftentimes cases will get resolved by mediators, you know, people who do subtle diplomacy.

And, you know, it seems to me that on some of these intractable issues, issues that have gone on for years and years, one of the places that ICANN could I think productively engage with the community is in providing a neutral. You know, someone who can, you know, say, okay, you know, what about this, what about this.

If they do this, will you do this and try to bring the people together. And part of that is having decision makers in the room and people who are capable of saying yes, I can live with that; my community can live with that. It's a part of the - our responsibility would be getting that authority from our communities to have that negotiating power but then have some neutral person who can listen to the points of view and bring them together.

And to my mind, and I've been around ICANN forever, that's always been one of our needs and something that we've never really had. So as you're looking at the budget and how you can productively engage the policy process, I would ask you to think about that.

(David): Yes. One question from my end was that I recently had a brief look into the budget because usually that's not something that I engage myself in. But there was a point of interest that I wanted to see. And I found that the policy department of ICANN is funded to the tune of 6.5 million taking out any travel

budget that also maybe part of the budget. That's only 4.4% of the entire ICANN budget.

That to me seems very low for one of the major functions of ICANN, i.e., making policy, making sure that the policy making processes (supports well). Four point four percent, that's not very much. So is there any intention of changing that, beefing that up?

Fadi Chehade: Okay (David). I know you can bribe people but that's a bit below the belt here. Okay. Yes. On a serious note, I'm very cognizant of that. And it's - you're probably eavesdropping on discussions I had with (David) just in the last 24 hours in which I'm very, very supportive of in the next literally three months as we finalize the F16 budget of having (David) do a substantive addition to his team.

But I wanted to be directed. I mean I don't want to just say we're going to do more for the same. So I'm trying to figure out with (David) where can we help. (Brett) just threw an idea at us that I think has enormous merit. And if you don't agree, tell him and me now.

But I think (David), this is one we should take. By the way, we've been doing some of that and we have a lot of demand on that. I just met with the chairman of a big company who was begging me to do some of that with people.

He is arguing - he says we could go to court and it'll cost both of us millions of dollars for the next three years. But if you could just provide your good offices with some facilitation so we can have chat. He just even asked for our offices. That's all. He said, "Can your good offices allow for some dialog?"

You know, we're doing it a little bit with South Africa where we're trying of course on (docva) to try and provide some place, some platform for people to

talk. And it's - every time we touched that area, it seemed to have produced good results.

Now whether we take it on seriously instead of just doing it in an (optisinal) way when I have the time or I can make some time to step in, that's very serious. We look for your guidance on that. But I like this idea very much as well as the welcoming of Chuck that we invest more in staff that can get engaged in writing and substantive work to help you all.

So and hopefully next year when we meet that budget is not 4% because that's an area we should address.

(Jonathan): So we've got others in the queue Fadi but I'll just make one quick remark on that. I mean we - in some areas we mediate well and that's what the working group process is all about. So we should be careful. But on the other hand, (Brett)'s right. There are some intractable issues that we've gone around and around for years that may.

So I think it won't - this just - it would have to go into something like that with a degree of consultation. Say look, where are the real problems here and where could this really be applied. We just be careful, as you said, in response to Stephane and others that we don't take a silver bullet type approach.

So that's just a personal response. Receptive but needs to be applied with care.

((Crosstalk))

(Jonathan): Yes. But there are others in the queue so let me get that.

Volker Greimann: Next in queue is (Susan).

(Susan): So I would agree with Chuck Gomes. I think staff has evolved greatly and I think I made this comment yesterday to staff that, you know, I can see a difference between participating on the Whois Review Team and how staff - they were always there to assist us and provide information but not to - they didn't necessarily keep us organized. And the drafting, you know, helped with the drafting.

I mean they did some of that but I can see a definite evolution and I'm - I participated in the EWG and the PPSI now and staff is amazing at reminding us that, oh no, we covered that or here, you need to look back at that.

And the organization element is tremendously important. And this may be a shameless plug but (Lisa Fifer) who is a consultant that worked on the EWG and continues with other Whois studies, she is completely invaluable. There's just no way we could have come with that report without her.

I mean we had (Margie) and (Denise) and Marika and any - I mean staff was very helpful. But she would oftentimes synthesize the discussion and bring it down to a core point that then we'd sort of stop and go oh, I don't think we're arguing about that point anymore, which is hard when you've got a strong viewpoint and discussion going.

So I would urge you to make sure that (Lisa) is - continues on the EWG. That's my own ask. But having - I do not see staff overstepping their bounds and providing viewpoints. They simply are extremely good at synthesizing what the discussion is and helping organize.

Volker Greimann: Thank you (Susan). Last in queue is Phil. Then we would like to move onto the next topic.

Phil Corwin: Thank you Volker and good morning Fadi. Phil Corwin for the record. Turning from the general to the specific and the big issue for the year, which is of course the transition and accountability measures.

I'm concerned about the burnout issue specifically on that; the community and the people involved both as members and as participants in the process. I don't see the pace that it's been going as being sustainable. The numbers group over a holiday weekend late in the year held four two-hour sessions over a Saturday and a Sunday.

And I'm concerned that at that pace that good people with good things to contribute will fall behind, drop off, become frustrated. And I think it's becoming clear not forgetting the appropriations language and Mr. (Strickling)'s recent speech in Washington about the impact of that on the NTIA.

I think everyone involved is committed to getting it done very well as soon as possible and maybe it's just the community disciplining itself but the pace has to be one that's sustainable for this and not one that becomes just exhausting for a great many participants where they fall away and the work quality suffers as a result.

So I don't have any other good ideas on that but I do think we need to recognize the danger in this very important process and figure out how to keep it going as quickly as possible but in a way that is sustainable for all the people who want to be engaged - all the stakeholders who want to play a role in it. Thank you.

(Jonathan): Thanks Phil. We've got oh at least according to the clock around five minutes more till the top of the hour. So and that's when I think this session is due to end. And we did have a particular topic yesterday, which was in and around operational issues rather than necessarily only on the policy issues.

And there was a question around what went right or wrong, possibly wrong last year in a kind of top three to five way and also what those particularly thinking ahead what those operational priorities might be.

Fadi, I don't know if you are happy and willing to talk about those things in this - in these closing minutes.

Fadi Chehade: Well, certainly - let me focus on what we could have done better. And let me make sure or let me get a sense if it echoes with what you think we could have done better.

I think the community felt last year that the distribution of the focus of ICANN was not right. I heard that very clearly from the community starting with my own time and where it was being spent. So that's fixed because I heard you.

And a lot of my focus and the focus of our community - of our staff has been assessed to address what you want us to get done. So that's for sure - the balance is now frankly much better thanks to you.

The second area we did not do very well last year was in ensuring that we are joined up as we grew because ICANN grew fast. ICANN staff I should say; the staff grew fast. We went from - we almost tripled in size in 2-1/2 years. And therefore we needed time to cool down and to figure out how we are joined up internally to serve you better. So we did that.

First of all, I didn't announce this publicly but for all practical purposes I froze hiring for six months. I told the teams slow down enough. Let's just figure out how we've got - let's invest in developing our team. Let's invest in (rooting) them an understanding who is ICANN, what is the ICANN community, who is on first and how things happen.

So we did that. We established a - for the first time an actual employee development staff team. We're investing in making sure our teams understand how to serve you.

And the other thing we did that is real I pushed decision making one step down from me in ICANN. And this was important. So we created now a second layer of management by pulling people from the ranks into the global leadership team and by pushing the decision from my office down to these teams.

So I'm less involved in the day-to-day decisions and now we have a deeper team. That was also part of building for the first time at ICANN a succession plan, not just for me but also for the next layer of managers. That's already also in place today at ICANN.

So these are things we didn't do well because the train was moving very fast, which brings me to the third thing we could have done better. We - the clock of ICANN, which should be set by the community, was often set by me and by the staff.

And that was a mistake that we figured out. By Istanbul we got frankly to what I would call a heated point where I understood very clearly that the amount of speed we're putting in the system was just not sustainable. So we slowed down. We started with pacing and a prioritization that is more reasonable, not just for the Board (and the) community but also for the Board.

I mean the Board was just also unable to keep up with the things coming at it. So these are things we didn't do well last year that I hope we do better this year. I started my year by taking a half hour to listen to every community leader, to every Board member.

I spent most of January making calls and developing what people believe good looks for ICANN in 2015. I have pretty extensive matrix now. And I will tell you this is news now. The number one thing - the one - the top category after interviewing all Board members, all SO/AC leaders and about 20 other community members that I was able to meet and reach out to.

So this - a lot of one on one interviews by me to just understand what do we all believe good is for ICANN. The area that got the top ranking was not the transition, was not even accountability. It was what we do to join up our community and make our community stronger, more cohesive, serve the community and support, to clarify roles between Board staff and stakeholders.

So a lot of focus was in that area believe it or not. So anyway, these are things we could have done better. Looking forward to next year I want to just mention one thing (Jonathan).

We have not done a good job as a staff in laying out what is the baseline of operational excellence. What are we measuring to serve you and serve the public interest well?

And so we produced -- all of you have seen it and commented on it -- a five-year operating plan. Remember we did the five-year strategic plan, then we did the five-year operating plan.

Within that five-year operating plan for the first time we laid out key performance indicators. There's exactly 20 of them. Internally I have about 80. But of these 80 we've picked the 20 top ones that we all as a community should be tracking very carefully.

And I'm gearing my whole organization so that effective FY16, which is July 1, we create a baseline for these 20 KPIs and then we report on them regularly to you so we see the trends of our performance, the trends of our performance indicators like you would expect from any well-oiled organization. So this is something I hope to do better next year as well.

(Jonathan): Thank you Fadi for that frank insight into your own personal thinking and to the way in which the organization is being run. I mean we're at the top of the hour now. Our next session involves going to changing rooms and being

present at the discussion between the CCWG on accountability and the Board.

I imagine many of you think that's a particularly important session. So unless there is an urgent or pressing question, we'll probably call it a day at this point.

So I'll take an opportunity to say two quick things. One, thank you to Fadi for coming. Thank you for responding at short notice to our inputs, which were only pulled together yesterday. Really appreciate that and that you come into an environment to deal with it in that way.

And we talked earlier about staff support and (sort of out) in front of you Fadi acknowledge the great work that the policy staff, you know, (David) and the policy staff Marika and (Co) do for us. They do a tremendous job in supporting the works.

So whilst there are real challenges about how we do our work and the whole volunteer burnout issue, we do benefit from great support and really appreciate the work that gets done. So thank you.

Fadi Chehade: We'll keep them.

(Jonathan): Yes. Good. Thank you very much. We'll call it a day.

END