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We often say the Internet community is an ecosystem, and that is an effective way to convey its complexity and interdependence. So it's fitting that this week, the Internet community is gathered here, in beautiful Costa Rica, where examples of stunning natural and complex ecosystems exist in abundance and harmony.

Few places on earth can rival Costa Rica in its vast variety of plants, animals, and insects. Despite its relatively small size, it is home to almost five percent of the world's species, including more than a thousand species of butterflies alone. The rainforest is tremendously varied, with red-eyed frogs, soaring trees wrapped in vines, and emerald and turquoise quetzal birds perched on verdant branches. In fact, there are so many plants and animals in Costa Rica that scientists have yet to name them all. What is less obvious is their interdependence. Remove one inhabitant from the ecosystem and you can trigger ripples of change through the ecosystem.

It's easy to apply that thinking to the Internet. The complex interplay of technology, organizations, and individuals is what makes the global Internet work. A little more than a year ago, a small event -- photos posted on a Facebook page in Tunisia -- sparked massive protests across the Middle East and redirected the future of an entire region. And in that moment, the power of this ecosystem was demonstrated beyond any shadow of a doubt.

The new world moves fast. Change comes rapidly and often unexpectedly. But our multistakeholder decision-making model can be slow -- sometimes painfully slow. Traditional top-down structures may at times get things done quickly. But in doing so, many voices do not get heard. And we need to hear them.



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The multistakeholder model we live by is built by consensus from the bottom-up, and that gives voice to the millions whose future is tied to the Internet. This model was created to protect the security and stability of the domain name system. It is adaptive, decentralized, and highly resilient.

And it will need to remain resilient in the months and years ahead. ICANN has entered a period of profound change, with important questions on the horizon. Look at what we face: a strong, growing, but still young new generic top-level domain program; a decision on the renewal of the IANA contract; growing concerns about cyber-security; an increasingly complex global geopolitical landscape; and, of course, a new CEO.

And there is no doubt that more change will come. Pressures on this organization are growing: political, ethical, financial, geopolitical, and operational. All of this presents an enormous challenge to a small organization in transition -- with fewer than 150 staff members covering activities around the world in an era of a rapidly expanding Internet. Are we ready to take on these challenges? Yes. Just as we have taken on many before.

The new gTLD program has occupied much of our time, energy, and resources in recent months. Development of this complicated multi-layered program has demanded detailed operational and financial planning, all while scrupulously maintaining independence and objectivity in our approach to applicants -- hence, the "No coke" rule.

The Internet has always been fertile ground for innovation and ICANN has long been committed to nurturing that potential by creating more competition and consumer choice in the domain name market. You can't predict innovation, but you can create an environment that fosters it. That is the primary goal of the new gTLD program.

In getting the program underway, we have met each challenge through careful planning and engagement with this community. And just as our thorough preparation ensured that the application window opened smoothly, and on schedule, we are equally ready for the next phase. As of last night, we have 254 registered users in the online application system. Each user can submit multiple gTLD applications. So when the registration period closes later this month on the 29th of March -- in just 17 days -- we will know the total number of users, but we will still have only a rough idea of how many applications we can expect by the 12th of April. We have an operational plan in place to ensure a smooth and neutral evaluation process -- whether it's 30 applications or 3,000. Although a new phase of work is about to begin, the staffing and budgetary considerations have been met, and we are ready to implement the next phases.

A significant part of the program has been incorporation of substantial new protections for rights holders.



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ICANN has worked collaboratively with world-renowned trademark and intellectual property experts throughout the six-year policy development and implementation process to create the strong trademark protection mechanisms that are now embedded in the program. The new gTLD space will offer significantly improved protections that have been developed through this exhaustive process.

We're creating a system to facilitate rapid takedowns of domain names for clear-cut cases of infringement. We're implementing a Trademark Clearinghouse to support rights protection requirements like sunrise periods and trademark claims services offered by new gTLDs. Since November, a group of community volunteers has devoted considerable time and attention to assisting ICANN in working out the implementation details of the Clearinghouse. We thank them.

The next big milestone is the publication of the applied-for new gTLD strings in early May. This transparency will help build awareness so that trademark holders and others can determine what steps, if any, to take in response. The ability to object is a fundamental protection, not just for trademark holders but for members of communities who believe an applied-for gTLD could misrepresent their community. So even if your organization has not applied, it's important to pay close attention to see if your rights or other legitimate interests are at risk from someone else's application.

We also thank the Joint Applicant Support Working Group and the board of directors for their work in launching the new gTLD Applicant Support Program on the 12th of January. It's intended to provide financial and non-financial assistance to qualifying applicants who might otherwise be unable to take advantage of the new gTLD program opportunities. It's been rewarding to see the community embrace this program so enthusiastically. Fifteen organizations and individuals have already stepped up to offer pro bono assistance in application writing, IPv6 infrastructure, DNSSEC consulting and internationalized domain name implementation, and we encourage others to join them.

An independent volunteer evaluation panel being formed right now will decide which applicants receive this financial support. The panel will play an important role in the Applicant Support Program. Applications to the panel will be accepted through the end of March.

IDN initiatives are going strong. The IDN ccTLD Fast-Track process continues to support eligible countries and territories. To date, there are 31 IDN ccTLDs in the root, representing 21 countries and territories, and the new gTLD program will bring even more opportunities for organizations to expand with IDN new gTLDs. Broadening the domain name system will allow the use of scripts like Arabic or Chinese at the top-level and lets the Internet more closely mirror all of the people who depend upon it.



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We have just completed the first two phases of the technically complex IDN variant issues project. More than 60 experts around the world participated in six variant case studies in phase one, and many also took part in phase two. The study has illustrated clearly there is not just one "variant problem." There's a vast range of cases that our experts have begun to classify. Now we can better see the complexity of the problems and begin to address it. This is important work that has not been done before, and we should reflect on that initial accomplishment as we enter into the next phase.

ICANN approaches IDN variants the same way it considers any other complex issue that comes from the community. With the help of community experts, we will continue to study and resolve them, taking into account many points of view. And above all, we will stand firm in our commitment to keep the Internet secure, stable, and unified. As I said earlier, the new gTLD program naturally has been the focus of ICANN staff and the community in recent months, but another key effort has also been underway. Since we met in Dakar in October, teams of dedicated staff and registrar representatives have been meeting to strengthen the terms of the Registrar Accreditation Agreement.

The war against cyber-crime and DNS fraud is being waged 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and the registrars -- along with the entire ICANN community -- recognize that law enforcement needs appropriate tools, among them better information about who owns and operates websites, subject to appropriate privacy considerations and protections.

I have been impressed by the time and effort that the registrar community has invested in this effort, at a time when many of them may also be assembling applications for new gTLDs. They have demonstrated that they understand their role in fighting e-crime and have shown remarkable willingness to resolve issues quickly.

As you can see from documents published prior to this meeting, we've made progress on several fronts. The negotiations are expected to incorporate amendments that address each of the 12 law enforcement recommendations, including Whois verification requirements, requiring registrars to maintain points of contact for reporting abuse, enforced reseller obligations, heightened obligations relating to privacy and proxy services, and increased compliance mechanisms. The negotiation includes discussion of substantial and unprecedented steps to improve the accuracy of Whois data.

I hope you will join us later today for a session to explore different methods of verifying Whois data. The long history of ICANN's work on Whois clearly illustrates how difficult this issue has been to resolve. I hope the community can find a solution that balances the needs of law enforcement to stop criminal activity with the concerns about privacy and free speech. Whether you represent a government or a registrar, or are a privacy or a free speech advocate, or simply an individual Internet user, we encourage you to join the discussion.



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Global adoption of DNSSEC is also a high priority for ICANN. It is a classic example of the bottom-up, multi-stakeholder approach in action, and its development in the IETF, along with international participation in DNSSEC root operations, has helped address immediate DNS security concerns. It is also a catalyst for the development of innovative security applications to help stem the global tide of cyber attacks.

Greater support by registrars, ISPs, registrants, and enterprises will build on current infrastructure deployment efforts to bring a better product to customers. Recent reports on DNS redirection attacks, support for DNSSEC by large ISPs like Comcast, and comments from governmental officials have highlighted DNSSEC's value. We ask all ISPs to turn on DNSSEC validation -- including those in Costa Rica. This is an important global effort and we need everyone's help to make it happen.

Here in San José, members of ICANN's Latin American and Caribbean Islands Regional At-Large Organization, or LACRALO -- which is now five years old -- have kicked off a week of activities, including a series of capacity-building and General Assembly sessions for their members. They will also hold a Showcase that highlights the achievements of their At-Large Structures. Minister of Science and Technology Secretary Alejandro Cruz and Raul Echeberria, LACNIC CEO and Chair of ISOC, will be keynote speakers.

As AFRALO did so well at that great ICANN meeting in Dakar, LACRALO will offer training and networking opportunities to help its members become more effective volunteers in the ICANN community. The results of the AFRALO events have been spectacular. Participation in the monthly AFRALO teleconferences has risen 30 percent since Dakar. As a member of the Nigeria Internet Users Coalition stated, these sessions were "a window that made me see and understand ICANN and At-Large issues." I hope that the LACRALO events will be equally successful. I thank LACRALO for organizing them, and Chair José Francisco Arce and Secretary Dev Anand Teelucksingh for their leadership.

(Let's give them a hand.)

For many years, ICANN has been providing its services over IPv6, and we are one of more than 900 website operators who have joined the Internet Society in its campaign to further the adoption of IPv6 through World IPv6 Launch day on the 6th of June. Three of the most popular websites in the world -- Facebook, Google, Yahoo -- have signed up, as have dozens of network operators and all five Regional Internet Registries. If you've not done so already, I urge you to join this effort, and to spread the word that this is the year of IPv6.

This year will see important decisions in the ITU community with respect to international telecommunications regulations that will be updated in December, and recommendations on the reform of the Internet Governance Forum being considered by the United Nations.



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Amidst all this activity, we must not lose sight of our role as stewards of a secure, stable, and interoperable Internet. We have a responsibility to the next generation of users to preserve and evolve the ecosystem. We must do this slowly and carefully, fully recognizing that we are interdependent with one another and with those who will come after us. This is an exciting time, a time of execution and a time of action, a time of promise and uncertainty, of opportunities and threats.

A significant threat lies within ICANN's existing structure. Let's consider the Nominating Committee as an example. Preserving ICANN's ability to act independently in the public interest is paramount to the future of the Internet and this institution. In view of the need for broad representation within ICANN's governance, inclusion of industry representatives on the board and in our work supports the multistakeholder model -- our means of ensuring independence.

In the years since ICANN was formed, the number of Internet users has grown from 146 million to some 2.3 billion today, around the world. The effects have been dramatic, bringing wholesale governance change and greater transparency to the entire world. I believe that ICANN, its board and our community, must keep pace with the growing diversity and expanding scope of the Internet. We must seize the opportunity to embrace the transparency and good governance that this precious resource deserves. ICANN must be able to act for the public good while placing commercial and financial interests in their appropriate context. How can it do this if all top leadership is from the very domain name industry it is supposed to coordinate independently?

A more subtle but related risk is the tangle of conflicting agendas within the board that would make it more difficult for any CEO to meet the requirements of this deeply rewarding and sometimes frustrating job. Progress has been solid since I addressed ethics and conflict issues in my Singapore opening remarks. Along with greater engagement with the community, a subcommittee on conflicts and ethics of the Board Governance Committee was formed to help directors evaluate their potential conflicts -- and as a result, this has increased instances where potentially conflicted members have left board discussions.

I applaud this change and believe it is time to further tighten up the rules that have allowed perceived conflicts to exist within the board. This is necessary not just to be responsive to the growing chorus of criticism about ICANN's ethics environment, but to ensure that absolute dedication to the public good always supersedes other priorities.

ICANN has long been blessed with leaders of exceptional technical expertise. Now we are poised to consolidate and strengthen our position among leading world organizations to better serve the global public interest. To do that we must broaden the pool from which our leaders are drawn. I believe this is as true for the board members as well as for the next CEO. There is value in having community members with domain name industry experience, but it is equally valuable to avoid even the perception of a conflict of interest.



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It is also important that new and occasionally dissenting voices from outside this world and this industry be given a shot at a seat at the table in our boardroom. And as the Internet's global users become more diverse in their backgrounds, so too must our board. The Nominating Committee was created to ensure independence and diversity by balancing industry representation with genuinely independent directors representing a wide range of views. Have we lived up to this challenge?

I believe candidates proposed by the NomCom should be fully independent and unconflicted. To ensure the truly independent selection of directors, it would seem desirable for NomCom members themselves to also come from outside the stakeholder groups already represented on our board through the stakeholder seats. It is my strong view that all members of the NomCom should be free of conflicts, and all directors selected by them should be financially independent of the domain name industry. This is a clear and simple bright line that should be drawn and enforced.

To ensure the highest degree of professionalism and relevant skills, nominees for the board should also have board-level experience in organizations -- whether governance, business, or the non-profit world -- that are of comparable size, staffing, global reach, and complexity. As ICANN grows and changes, the board must also. Reform of the board selection process is not just desirable. I believe it is imperative. Ideally, a fully independent and non-conflicted NomCom should be in place before the next nomination cycle begins.

We continue to take steps to strengthen ICANN's conflict of interest procedures to address these issues. With the board's strong support we've engaged a group of highly respected international experts to advise on reviewing ICANN's code of conduct. This team consists of Jermyn Brooks, Aron Cramer and Mervyn King, each renowned for his significant contributions in the field of ethics.

A key challenge for my successor will be to find his or her place in this environment and to continue the drive to clarify and cast sunlight on the sometimes murky relationships that exist among the board, staff, community, and industry. I've already shared my views with the selection committee about the qualities that I feel a new CEO should bring to ICANN, and the challenges that person is likely to face. I've committed the board and I commit to you that I will do my utmost to ensure a smooth and successful transition, including helping my successor to navigate the complexities of these existing relationships, if that assistance is requested. I believe the next CEO must accept that ICANN's place in the world has fundamentally changed. It is on a higher public stage, engaged at a much more influential level than at any time in its history.

In Brazil, China, India, Qatar, Russia, Turkey, this organization is now known and respected and welcomed at the highest levels. We need look no further than the gracious participation of President Chinchilla in this meeting this morning for evidence of this.



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Among global organizations like the International Red Cross, Interpol, the Organization of American States, the OECD, SWIFT, the Universal Postal Union, and the World Economic Forum, ICANN is a partner and a collaborator, a colleague engaged in a common public mission. That global posture echoes the work we have collectively done to make the Internet a reflection of the world's diversity. Through the Affirmation of Commitments, the United States government is no longer the overseer of ICANN and the domain name system; the world is. Through internationalized domain names, billions of users can now access the Internet in their primary language scripts.

ICANN is now a respected participant in global cyber security efforts, strengthened by the introduction of DNSSEC around the world. Our engagement is demonstrated by our close collaboration with security organizations and operational security communities to address a current threat to the DNS, and to prepare for future threats that may arise. We are encouraged to see such collaboration among community members.

ICANN is now trusted on a global scale for its professionalism, skills, and technical knowledge. And that internationalization is reflected internally. Our small ICANN staff has taken on the face of the world community it serves: 30 nationalities are represented; 35 languages are spoken. On our strong executive team we now have regional vice presidents who reflect the regions they live and work in, with access and relationships at the highest levels of government and civil society.

This world-class talent includes Nigel Hickson, whom many of you know from his extensive involvement with this community through the GAC, and who joins us today as our Vice President for Europe. Please join me in welcoming Mr. Nigel Hickson.

Dr. Xiaodong Lee, our new Vice President for Asia, came to us from CNNIC and serves a bridge from Asia to ICANN. And of course we are very proud to have Rodrigo de la Parra as our Vice President here, as we are in his back yard, in Latin America and the Caribbean. Xiaodong, I don't see you but maybe you're here as well. You're not sitting in the front -- but we welcome you as well. But they're are a visible demonstration of our commitment to internationalization, and ICANN is enriched by their presence. And a more significant change: In our philosophy, we are global. In our outlook, in our thought processes, in our daily life, in our reach, in public meetings like this, and in our operations, and in our community: We are global.

When I arrived, people often asked, "What is this organization?" "What does it do and why does it matter?" I rarely hear that anymore. Its importance is clear. Its role is clear. Its place on the world stage is clear.

As I have shared with the CEO selection committee, here are certain qualities that are worth considering in selecting my successor: Courage. Vision. Globalism. Strategic insight. Leadership. Endurance. Integrity. And straight talk. And an absolute commitment to a secure, stable, and unified Internet.



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Whoever succeeds me will need all those skills and more to preserve and build on the many successes that ICANN and this community have collectively achieved. Together we have reached new levels of performance and delivery on behalf of the world. Maintaining that standard will not be easy.

This job is not impossible; it's just extremely difficult. But I love a good challenge -- all of the ones up 'til now, and the ones in the months ahead. I look forward to the hard work, the discussion, the debate, the collaboration, just as you do, here in Costa Rica at ICANN 43.

Thank you very much.