

LONDON – Middle East Strategy: One Year Later
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ICANN – London, England

ANNOUNCER: This is the Middle East Strategy: One Year Later, from 15:00 until 16:30 in Sovereign, Local Time.

BAHER ESMAT: Good afternoon everyone. Thank you for coming. While we're trying to fix the technology glitches, I'm going to start to welcome you to the Middle East Strategy Session at the ICANN London Meeting. We're going to give you an update on where we are with the Middle East Strategy. My name is Baher Esmat. I do stakeholder engagement with ICANN in the Middle East. I'm joined by a Panel of colleagues from the community and from ICANN as well, who've been part of this effort.

To my far right, Ali AlMeshal, who comes from Bahrain, is running the ISOC Chapter of Bahrain and has been an active Member of the ICANN At-Large community. Recently he was elected Vice-Chair of the APRALO. To my right, Fahd Batayneh, who joined ICANN as Stakeholder Engagement Coordinator in the Middle East a few months back. Since then, he's been doing a tremendous job in coordinating efforts in the Middle East, specifically with the strategy we're going to talk about today.

To my far left, Christine Arida. Christine comes from the National Telecommunication Regulatory Authority of Egypt. She's also a Member of the Fellowship Program Committee at ICANN, and she's been part of

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the Middle East Strategy Working Group as well. To my left, Mohamed El Bashir, who works for Qatar’s Communication Regulatory Authority, which used to be [ISOC Qatar 00:13:16] until very recently. Mohamed is well known in the ICANN community. He’s been part of many Working Groups in Africa and in the Middle East as well.

Let me start by saying that we started this effort more than a year ago. I remember the very first meeting we had with community members at ICANN Toronto Meeting at the end of 2012. The discussion back then was about what is it that we can do better to enhance our engagement efforts in the region. Back then we were lucky because our colleagues in Africa were just starting the African strategy effort. Some thought, “Okay, let’s see what the Africans are doing and maybe we can do something similar?”

We started a process to form a Working Group from community members, to look into ICANN engagement in the Middle East, to identify priorities, strategic focus areas to work on. The Working Group was launched in early 2013, and it was a Working Group of 20+ members, working mainly through emails and conference calls. They put the objectives, they finalized the strategy in June 2013, and we announced the three-year strategy at the ICANN Durban meeting, together with a one-year implementation plan.

This year today is sort of concluding. We’re here today to report on what we’ve done in the past year; to tell you what worked well, what didn’t work well, and also to tell you about our plan for FY 15, the coming year. The main focus areas of the strategy were DNS security and stability, domain name industry, and Internet governance

ecosystem. Just highlights from the outcomes of the first year of the implementation, and then my colleagues are going to go into the details of every project and initiative we've been working on.

We launched two Task Forces; one on Arabic script IDNs. This Task Force has been looking into what we call the IDN variants. They have formed the Label Generation Panel of the Arabic script. Fadi's going to talk to this in detail. Today they started to look into new areas like universal acceptance. This is also a community-driven Task Force, and it got 25 Members from different parts and different countries that use the Arabic script. It's not only about the Arabic language, it's about the Arabic script.

The other Task Force is the Capacity Building Task Force. The reason this Task Force was created was because a great part of the Middle East Strategy was on capacity building, and it was not capacity building in the traditional form of technical capacity building, on DNS, but it covered a broader scheme or spectrum of capacity building efforts, including in areas like Internet governance and also areas relating to DNS business.

This Task Force was created early this year to try to lead on the implementation of the capacity building effort in the Middle East. One of the events that the Task Force was instrumental in was the School on Internet Governance in the Middle East, that took place in Kuwait last month. Again, my colleagues are going to cover that in detail. Another key outcome of the first year of the Middle East Strategy was the launch of the Middle East DNS Forum.

That event took place early this year in Dubai, in partnership with the Telecom Regulatory Authority of United Arab Emirates and Internet Society, and the [unclear 00:18:21] and .org and other members of the community. It was a very successful event. This is becoming an annual event, so from now on we're going to have an annual DNS Forum in the Middle East.

The other annual event that came out of the strategy was the School on Internet Governance, which was also in partnership with community members from KITS, the Kuwait Information Technology Society, RIPE NCC, Afillias, and again, this is going to be an annual event to develop capacities in the Internet governance space. We also concluded – maybe today, and this is fresh news – two strategic partnerships.

One was with the Ministry of Information Communication Technology of Qatar on promoting the multistakeholder model, and working together on initiatives in relation to IDNs. That was signed an hour ago. The other agreement that was signed was with Egypt's National Telecommunication Regulatory Authority, on establishing a DNS Entrepreneurship Center. This is going to be a regional DNS center to develop expertise in the domain name space.

The other piece of good news that was also announced today during the opening ceremony was the establishment of Lebanon's Internet center. This is the first multistakeholder platform to be established in the Middle East at national level. The objective of LINC is to oversee and lead on the Internet policy development issues in Lebanon, including the operation of .lb, the ccTLD of Lebanon. These are the key outcomes from FY 14; just highlights.

Moving forward with the coming year, we've developed a plan for year two, an implementation plan. Of course, before we did that, the Middle East Strategy Working Group also worked on evaluating FY 14, again, to see what worked, what didn't work, and to try to identify what areas we need to continue to work on, and what new areas we need to focus on in the coming year.

All the documents, whether the assessment of the last year implementation plan, or the implementation of the next year, are all posted. I have the links. Once we have the presentation on the screen – it's already on the website – you can go and check the links. For FY 15, just key highlights for what the strategy is going to cover. We have the DNS Entrepreneurship Center, and this is going to be a major project. It's a regional project that aims at developing the domain name industry in Africa and the Middle East.

There are so many areas and milestones that we need to achieve and accomplish through that project. We're also going to commission a study on the domain name market in the Middle East. We're still in discussion with people within the community on how best to do this. This is one key project we have for the coming year. Of course we have the regional and national multistakeholder forums – the Multistakeholder Internet Governance Forum.

We've been working closely with the Arab IGF, not only as ICANN, but actually as a Middle East community. Many Middle East stakeholders do, and have been, supporting the Arab IGF and will continue to support it. Today we're witnessing the birth of some national multistakeholder forums as well, like LINC, in Lebanon. We're going to work very closely

with them and make sure they'll start off their activities successfully. We also have a project to do, and it's a more solid and more organized media outreach.

This is ICANN-focused. This was a request that came from the Strategy Working Group. They thought that there was not enough coverage for ICANN in the Middle East media. The proposal was to put this as a key project or activity for the coming year. Our two Task Forces; the IDN Task Force and the Capacity Building Task Force are going to continue their efforts. As I said, the IDN Task Force is going to look into new areas. In addition to IDN variants they're going to look into universal acceptance as well.

The Capacity Building Task Force is going to focus on the concept of the trainers. This concept was identified as a priority for the Middle East region, so the Task Force is going to look into how to implement that in the Middle East, as part of our engagement efforts. I was naturally going to stop here and pass the floor onto my next panelist. I'm not sure whether we're ready or not. Can people follow the slides online?

If you can log into Adobe Connect on this session, log into ICANN 50 and click on the Middle East Strategy Session. You can get to the slides there, because we're still having difficulty getting them up on the screen. If you are okay with that, we can carry on. I'll turn it over to Fahd Batayneh, who's going to talk in more detail about the Task Force on Arabic Script IDNs.

FAHD BATAYNEH:

Thank you Baher. Good afternoon everybody. I'm pleased to be here with you. Sorry for the technical difficulties. I guess technology fails us when we need it the most. You have other options to view the slides. The slides are up. One of the updates for today's session will be on the Task Force on Arabic Script IDNs. Our colleague and friend, Sarmad Hussain, should have been here presenting, but he had to run to another meeting at the last moment. I'll be presenting on behalf of the Task Force.

I'm actually ICANN staff, but have been coordinating the work for them and I'm following up on everything that they're doing. I guess I'm in a good position to present the updates they have. The Task Force on Arabic Script IDNs is actually an outcome of the Middle East Strategy. It was initiated sometime in September of last year, and they made an official announcement during the Arab IGF in Algeria.

I'll be talking a little more about the other aspects of the Task Force, but to kick-start with... A couple of objectives were identified when the Task Force was initiated. These are not the only objectives the Task Force will be working on. Moving forward, if they come across issues that they need to tackle, they'll definitely add them as part of their objectives. There are a couple of objectives, such as Arabic script label generation rule set for the root zone.

This is one of the hottest topics at the moment within the ICANN community and the IDN community. We have second-level LGRs for the Arabic script. We have Arabic script internationalized registration data. As a good example, WHOIS is only displayed in English, probably, or in Latin characters. One of the tasks the Task Force will work on is to

actually internationalized WHOIS data, probably. Then we have universal acceptability of Arabic script IDNs.

Again, ICANN and the Internet community are pushing towards fulfilling in some sense or another the topic of universal acceptance. We also have in the room Jon Hollander, who's the General Manager of the AP TLD, and he's pushing a lot for universal acceptance. Then we have technical challenges around registration of Arabic script IDNs, and they are plenty. The technical guys would know more about this stuff.

Operational software for registry and registrar operations. DNS security matters specifically related to Arabic script IDNs, and technical training material around Arabic script IDNs. Now, you will see that there are two items highlighted in red. These are what the Task Force are currently pushing hard to happen. In a nutshell, the Task Force at the moment has 26 members from 15 different countries. If you look at the list of countries you'll find folks from Australia and the UK participating in the work of the Task Force.

They speak more than nine languages. One of the new additions to the entire sphere of the Task Force is that we have a couple of folks from Africa, with expertise in African languages. They come from diverse disciplines, such as academia, registries, registrars, national and regional policy bodies, community-based organizations and technical community. The membership is open and it's community based.

If anybody in the room would like to join this Task Force you can just approach me at the end of the meeting, and I'd be happy to guide you on how to go through the process of becoming a member of this Task

Force. Details of interests of members are posted by the [unclear 00:30:46]. Discussions are publicly archived. We actually have a Wiki space online, and you'll find a link there to all the discussions that are taking place on the mailing list.

As I said, the Task Force has a Wiki space where we post all the documents and issues relating to teleconference calls, and even face-to-face meetings, on that Wiki space. Of course, there's a link here to the email archive. These slides are available online, so you can download them from the session's small microsite. You can go through the various links that exist here. Arabic script TLDs that are assigned, are delegated, to-date there are 19. Most of them are IDN ccTLDs. We have a couple of IDN gTLDs. These are the 19 different ones.

Now, in terms of IDN variants, there are needs and then there are challenges. Of course, they are connected in some sense or another to security and stability. When we talk about security and stability needs, there is this example of the name .pakistan, and this is in the Arabic script. If we look at the letter that's highlighted in red, this is the kaph. The one to the left is the Arabic language kaph, and the one to the right is actually the Persian – or is it the Urdu? – it's the Persian kaph.

I guess there's another third kaph for Urdu? This is one of the issues that occur within IDNs, so this is called variants. The Task Force has identified more than 120 cases of visually same or similar Arabic script characters. That's a large number. We have a huge repository of characters that are fine and can proceed with the Arabic script IDNs, but then there are more than 120 that actually need to be dealt with in a special manner.

There are 16 IDN ccTLD applications, with four applications with variants. As part of the IDN ccTLD fast-track program, you can apply for a couple of strings that represent your country, but then you can only delegate one. When we talk about IDNs, the key issue here is that ICANN actually write an IDN in any language within a script, using a keyboard, wherever I am.

For example, if I'm in Saudi Arabia and I would like to write a domain name using an Arabic language keyboard, I should actually be able to reach the same content if I'm in Iran or Pakistan, where they use different keyboards, which is the Farsi keyboard and the Urdu keyboard. That's one of the issues that the Task Force is generally tackling. In terms of challenges, actually there are three different challenges identified by the Task Force.

One is consistency and innumerability. As I was stating earlier, regardless of what your keyboard is, you should be able to reach the same URL and same intended content. Then we have management tools; registration, configuration, maintenance, security and monitoring. One good example is if you are doing a WHOIS lookup, using the command prompt, the command prompt actually accepts only ASCII characters.

If you try to switch your keyboard to a different language or a different script, it actually just shows you question marks. It doesn't work. If you want to look up an IDN, you have to convert it to its ASCII representation, then copy that large string that means nothing and throw it into the command prompt to actually show you the WHOIS entry for that domain name.

The third issue is actually usability in applications, such as browsing, emailing, search, privacy, etcetera, and this all falls under universal acceptance of TLDs in general. Of course, I believe there's a session on universal acceptance of TLDs on Wednesday. If you are interested in that topic I'd really encourage you to attend that session, and meet up with my colleague, Edward Lewis, who was actually hired by ICANN to focus on universal acceptance.

Now, in terms of progress of the Task Force, the Task Force has done a lot of really nice stuff. They were the first group to actually come out with the Arabic Script Generation Panel document. They were the first group to come out with the principles for inclusion, exclusion and deferral of Arabic script variants. They've been doing a lot of MSR analysis and feedback, principles on variants and even code points of LGR.

The Task Force has also been doing a lot of community outreach. It was launched during the Arab IGF in Algeria. One or more Members of the Task Force presented during the IGF in Bali, during the Middle East DNS Forum in Dubai, during the ICANN Singapore Meeting, and the convened APTLD Meeting in Oman, Muscat.

The current work and the next steps. The Working Group will start work soon, or has started actually, on code points for LGR. They are also going to work on an XML manual. In terms of timelines, they will finalize the discussion of code points expected end of August, finalize the discussions on variants by September end, label rules, they will start in August and end in October, and then finalizing the LGR part sometime

around November and December. That's when the Task Force expects to have its third face-to-face meeting on this topic.

Additional work by the Task Force on Arabic script IDNs. Actually, I don't want to go deep into this, but the Task Force just had its second face-to-face meeting in Istanbul, two weeks ago. It was a five-day meeting. Three days were dedicated to LGR, two days for universal acceptance on Arabic script IDNs. The plan is to tackle various issues related to universal acceptance, whether they're browser issues, IDN email issues, SEO issues, smartphones – you name it. Whatever application could use a domain name, they'll be tackling it, in terms of universal acceptance.

Mind you, universal acceptance is not limited just to IDNs. It even includes the new bunch of new gTLDs. Not all new gTLDs will be working fully in much the same way a .com or a .net or even any ccTLD would work. That's my part. I'll be handing the mic back to you, Baher.

BAHER ESMAT:

Mohamed, over to you.

MOHAMED EL BASHIR:

Thank you very much Baher. Fahd, if you can put the slides on? Really, I'll be talking about the Middle East DNS Forum, which is one of the first events that has been organized by the Working Group. This is the first DNS Forum that's been held in the region. It was held in Dubai for two days last February. It was hosted by Emirates TRA, and organized by ICANN and ISOC. It had a big number of participation. I think it

exceeded 100 participants, and 30 were remote participants in that meeting.

The distribution of that, what we saw was about 43% from businesses, private sector – that includes ISPs, entrepreneurs, consultants – and also a government representative attended the meeting from regulatory authorities in the region as well. There was an interest from the government. Technical community was there, and civil society was there as well. You can see it was a well-attended meeting over the two days.

On the two days, the Panels were experts, either from the region or internationally. They presented their experience and best practices to the audience. Also we had Working Groups, over five meetings, focusing on specific issues. One of the major issues that was discussed in the Forum was the status of the registries and DNS industry in the region. Just to give you a quick overview, there was good figures and numbers of registration coming from the region.

We're seeing Iran topping the registration of the region. I think they've now exceeded 500,000 currently. We're seeing changes in the [unclear 00:41:27] region, where Qatar has opened and liberalized its domain name registry. It allows registrars competition and choice in the registry. Oman recently as well launched their .om new registry, managed by the TRA, and Emirates are leading as well, in terms of the domain name registration, exceeding 100,000 currently.

In Saudi Arabia, registration is still free for Saudi citizens. I think the current figure we have there, in terms of registrations, exceeds 30,000.

The discussion was about how we can change this picture in terms of increased domain name industry, the number of registrations, and the businesses associated with that. Basically, there was big discussion and debate about industry development, or DNS industry in the region and development.

We discussed about the success stories or factors, which was registries reforming, in terms of opening registry systems, adopting automated systems, enabling flexible registrar onboarding – that means easier registrar accreditation procedures, which will enable competition and choice on the registry side. Competitive pricing is one of them. Prices need to be reduced in the region, because it's very high compared to other regions.

Marketing and awareness were also discussed, and integration [unclear 00:43:04] as well, maybe to boost the registrations and the DNS businesses in the region. Security and trust, and especially the deployment of DNSSEC in the region, and why currently until now in the region we don't have an assigned registry so far. Our registry security issues have been discussed as well, at length.

The new gTLD was discussed and debated a lot. This is just to give you a hand on the current applied new gTLD strings from the region. You have the IDN, Arabic script ones. It varies from corporates, to banks, like the string [.batic, 00:44:00], which is a Kuwaiti financial firm. We also have operators applying for new gTLD strings, like [unclear 00:44:11]. We're also seeing oil and gas companies, like [unclear], applying for new gTLDs as well.

On the bottom of the slide you'll see the three cities that have applied for new gTLDs – .doha, .dubai, and .abudhabi. .abudhabi actually applied for the Arabic string as well, beside the English string. We are seeing a positive number of applications coming from the region. I think it's a total of 17 applications. The development of the registrar business in the Middle East was also one of the topics that's debated in length.

The discussion was about the challenges that face registrars, and why we have very few registrars from the region. In the region I think we currently have about seven registrars. One is in Morocco, one is in Kuwait and one is in Jordan. We have about four registrars based in the UAE. Some of them are international operations, but registered in the UAE. There is a newly ICANN-accredited registrar in Pakistan. The numbers are very small, so concerning why we don't have that business in the region was discussed in length.

The participants agreed that we have national challenges as well, in terms of incorporating business, and online businesses also hinder us, besides ICANN requirements as well. It's a little tough in terms of the requirements for registrars. We listened to some of the registrars' issues in the region. At the meeting, Akram Attalah, who is ICANN's President of the Global Domains Division, was present, and he listened to the concerns as well.

As an outcome of the Forum, I think everyone agreed that we need active participation from the region in the different foras. Currently we need it either on the technical level or the policy development level. On the technical level, we need more participants from our region in IETF meetings, and we need more engineers to attend IETF meetings.

We also need more participation in ISOC and within ICANN as well, in the different constituencies. We're lacking active participation from the region in those bodies. In policy development as well, very few active voices are heard from the region. Within ICANN, PDP, within the ccNSO or gNSO, because we now have new registries from our region... There's also the need to create new regional bodies for coordination.

The Middle East DNS Forum is definitely a good fora. An Arab INET I think is required. We hosted an Arab INET in Qatar, and we're looking forward to having more of such meetings. The Arab IGF is there. We had the second meeting and we're looking forward to a third. The Middle East Strategy as well is a good drive to more of this engagement. We need to have [thoughts 00:48:00] for us to be sustainable, working, and we need to have more people engaged on those foras.

BAHER ESMAT: Thank you Mohamed. I'll turn over to Ali AlMeshal.

ALI ALMESHAL: Thanks Baher. The objective of my slides here is to share with you the experience, impact and effect of the types of engagement that were part of our strategy that's been developed for the Middle East, and also the Action Items that have been taken. Coming from the Internet community as an ISOC in Bahrain, we officially spoke in that Middle East Strategy to have an engagement from ICANN to come and do an outreach within the Gulf countries, at least if I'm speaking about that region, to get them as much as possible engaged.

Thanks to ICANN, they have accepted the invitation and they were with us in Bahrain for a week. Just to let you know, before even that engagement, I'll let you know what the impact even a short visit had and can have for any organizations, Bahrain, to be a certified ALS and be engaged with ICANN, was done for a one- or two-day meeting with Bahrain. That was the day I came to know Baher. It was through a friend of mine. He just introduced me to Baher, and Baher was in Bahrain. That was two years back, or even more – two and a half years.

Baher sat with me for a time, explaining to me what ICANN is, what they do, how they can help, and from that, Bahrain started to be on ICANN's map. We immediately applied to be an At-Large Structure, and since that we've been there, as of two years. The next visit that we had, with Fahd coming to Bahrain, was again just to bring up that as an ALS in Bahrain, The Bahrain Internet Society alone, to be honest we can't just go and get engaged with all of the different stakeholders; be that government or private sector.

In that visit, one of the objectives of the Middle East Strategy was to get the two-way engagement, between ICANN and the other stakeholders, or the community. That started with that visit. Then the education of these stakeholders, about all the ICANN business, I will not go into the details or all of these technicalities; the gTLD, ccTLD and others. Then to promote the multistakeholders. I will be speaking about what has happened – not in detail – and what the impact of that was.

These are the stakeholders that have been engaged during that visit – the TRA in Bahrain, almost all the big Telco providers in Bahrain, and the universities, and the private sector business. Topics that have been

discussed, almost with all of them, were awareness about ICANN, the IANA function, NTIA, root [unclear 00:51:34] and the Arab IGF, and all other items that go under ICANN.

Before I go to this part of this slide, when the engagement happened there, I'll tell you the result of that visit. First of all, the meeting with the TRA brought up a number of good issues and good points that [woke 00:52:01] them, and they're now more than happy to look into getting some ICANN events in Bahrain, which we didn't have before. This is a good step. Also on the business level we have met with the private sector and part of our strategy within the Middle East is the Train the Trainer Program. We were trying to look into how we can get this into action.

In part of the meeting with the private sector we raised this, and as a follow up after the visit, I followed up with the private business, and the interest is there. I think after this ICANN Meeting, we'll be looking into how we can start getting that action into place and start the process of Train the Trainer within Bahrain. On the other hand, you see that we were having an event in Kuwait, which is the Summer School of [unclear 00:53:00].

I'd just like to pinpoint how this region, which is the Gulf, in particular, needs a lot of engagement, a lot of outreach and a lot of awareness. I'm part of the Middle East and I was part of the Capacity Building Task Force who looked after this event that we conducted in Kuwait. Of all the fellowships, all the applications that were sent to us to come and participate in the Summer School in Kuwait, I haven't seen any single GCC person who applied for that.

What does that mean? Is that because we didn't give enough time? Because of awareness? Because of lack of information? Although it is in Kuwait, it is within the Gulf, none of the people who applied were from the Gulf. I know that some of the Kuwaitis attended the event, but when we announced the Summer School we haven't seen anybody applying. There are people from the Middle East, but nobody from the Gulf.

That gives a very critical indicator that we need to work hard with the Gulf. There is the potential. There is an interest, but we need to know how we can improve on that. My penultimate point is the business engagement. Again, I have discussed this with a number of ICANN staff. I am coming from a banking industry. I'm looking after the online business.

There are so many other SMEs or even enterprises who work within this environment. How can we engage these? How can we get them into ICANN and into DNS businesses? None of them – at least I'm speaking about the country I'm part of – are engaged at all. Banks are dealing with the Internet. SMEs are dealing with the Internet, but nobody knows what ICANN does, and how ICANN can help.

I'm part of that. I'm trying to get the executive management of the organization of the bank that I work with to buy this, so I become part of that inner state of me becoming part of the Bahrain ISOC Chapter. What they think about it always is that it's just working and it's just the Internet. I'm telling them, "We are doing an e-commerce business. We're providing an online business so we have to be there." Still, that is not being bought by the organization.

There are a number of challenges. There are a number of obstacles. The only way we convince them, especially the SMEs and the financial sectors, or even others, what value they'll be getting – if we can add that value, if we can convince them that there's a benefit and a value – they will definitely get engaged. If we don't [browse 00:56:04] that though, and put it in a frame of, "This is what you'll get and this is how it will help you"...

On the other side, we have to highlight the risk of them not being part of this and not knowing what's going on. There is a risk. [unclear 00:56:19] attract and to reach these SMEs within the Middle East, by highlighting the benefit and values, as well as highlighting the risk, then definitely we'll be able to get them engaged. Finally, I would say we have achieved a lot, and there is now good interest from different entities within Bahrain to host different types of ICANN events, and the Arab IGF, as well as some ISOC events.

I won't go into the details of these, but now we're working on this and imagine, that was just for one visit. If there are more, think about what will happen. Thank you very much.

BAHER ESMAT: Thank you Ali. Now we're going to hear from Christine about the Capacity Building Task Force.

CHRISTINE ARIDA: Thank you Baher. You have made a very nice introduction about the importance of capacity building for the Middle East Strategy, and how it

was identified as one important dimension. I was happy to listen to colleagues, Mohamed and Ali, about both the industry development in the DNS Forum, and the stakeholder engagement. Actually, I'll be talking about two very specific capacity building activities that were identified and carried through in the implementation phase.

The first one is the Task Force on Capacity Building and Awareness, and the second one will be the Middle East and adjoining countries School on Internet Governance, that was actually mentioned from various speakers before me. I actually have many Members of the Capacity Building Steering Committee around the table, so maybe if any of them would like to intervene after I've finished, that would be great.

Regarding the Capacity Building and Awareness Task Force, the aim was actually to understand and identify the need of capacity building for the region. This was the idea, and then to coordinate the execution of specific programs and activities that were recommended by the Middle East strategy. Five broad topics were identified for this Task Force. One was the DNS registry and registrar operation, and I have to note that those are all in coherence with the Middle East Strategy.

The second being the domain name marketing and business development. The third DNS protocols and technologies, including all the technical issues; DNSSEC, IPv6, IDNs and so forth. Then one topic on DNS security specifically, and the final being Internet governance. An open call was circulated on December 1st 2013, to establish the Task Force. It was sent to all interested candidates and stakeholders in the region.

We received 21 applications, and from the Middle East Strategy Working Group, a Steering Committee was formed from a number of members. It was to see how we were going to evaluate applications and how we're going to identify Task Force Members. Actually, we received very good applications, and after review, every single applicant was welcomed on board, which was a very positive signal.

The Task Force was formed in January 2014, with members from ten countries; Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and Turkey. We even had a gender balance for females, 17. Not a very good balance, but we can have more I hope. The good thing is that we had such a large experience and expertise that have combined on all five topics. We really had techies on board, we had people about industry, and we had Internet governance people there.

So we do have a good Task Force. The idea is to work with this Task Force on two specific tracks. One is to develop instructors, and the other is to develop the curriculums. Frankly, there is a lot of work still to be done with the Task Force. The Task Force is not yet very active. There's a lot of work to do, but the idea is to try to combine that with the Train the Trainer model, to see how we can push that forward, so there are ongoing discussions in that area. This is a building block in that direction.

I will maybe ask Fouad to give some more ideas about the Task Force future plans, when I finish, if you would like, if he doesn't mind. One other activity that I want to mention here is the Middle East School on Internet Governance. This was a specific activity that was listed, but it

was also tackling the track of Internet governance that was identified also in the Task Force. Just to combine the issues together.

The idea was to have an annual program, done every year, to have intensive Internet governance specific learning courses. The idea came from many initiatives that you've probably seen and know have happened across many places of the world – similar schools and other initiatives. There was an Arab Summer School of Internet Governance at some point in time, so I'm not saying this is the second one, because it's a bit different. It was tweaked and done a bit differently, but it's a development of that.

The aim was to stimulate and develop the regional engagement in Internet governance, because this was something that was identified as a need, as was, as Ali has mentioned, stakeholder engagement. In every single fora related to Internet governance there was need to develop regional engagement. This is one specific aim of this school. It's supposed to rotate yearly between the countries of the region, and the idea was to have really focused sessions tailored to the region, so it won't be a program coming from elsewhere.

These will be topics that are in need in this region, and they'll be as interactive as possible. It was supposed to cover different aspects of Internet governance, like technical policy, even legal, economic, social and cultural. At the end, the aim is to have some practical, hands-on training workshops, that are oriented with roundtables and case presentations.

The target group of this school in general is of course the regional countries, and it was fairly open to any different stakeholders. We said students, practitioners, researchers, even professionals, coming from different stakeholder groups; whether academia, civil society, government, private sector, technical, whichever. The whole idea is to build a bigger group of a connected group of alumni students that can engage and also maybe be trainers afterwards for several of the initiatives, and even for the school itself.

The first program was actually held in Kuwait. It was hosted by the Kuwait Information Technology Society. It was just last month. We had 43 applications, almost all of which requested funding, which is clearly something we should seriously look at. We had 25 participants in the end, ten of which were from Kuwait, and the 15 others coming from nine other countries – [you see various 01:05:00], Afghanistan, Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Kuwait, Sudan, Tunisia, Turkey and Yemen.

We had here a better gender balance. We had 40 females and 60 males. We had ten instructors. I have to mention that eight were from the region, which I think is a very good sign. Two came from outside the region. One of them is with us here – hi there! – and the instructors were actually coming from different stakeholder groups. We had people from government, from civil society, from technical community.

It was an interesting program to see. It was a five-day intensive agenda. When I say intensive, it was intensive. I'll tell you some of the comments that we received from the students. They said it was overwhelming, in some places. So it was intensive. The topics that were covered – here is

a snapshot of the agenda. We had a good part on Internet history, so basically what the Internet is and how it began.

Then there was a bit about Internet governance in general, about the actors and the issues. Then we talked a lot about multistakeholderism, about the stakeholders and their roles. Then there was specific courses about domain name systems. We had in-depth ccTLDs, gTLDs and IDN sessions, because IDNs are very important for the region.

Then we had a good introduction about ICANN, about the IANA function. We also had sessions about the industry of the domain names, regionally and globally. Then we had a good part of the program about Internet public policies, where we discussed rights, we discussed diversity. We even had online jurisdiction and cyber security.

At the end there was an experience done, which we call the Mini IGF and Mini MAG. It's like a mock simulation. It was conducted on the last day, and [unclear 01:07:01] will ask Fouad maybe to give his feedback, if he likes, on how it was run and how it went. To quickly tell you about the feedback from the people, some mentioned very innovative ideas. They said we could have field trips to specific relevant stakeholder groups in the place where we are.

So we can go and visit the Telcos, we can visit the ISPs, we can visit the government, the RAs, whatever. I found that a very innovate and nice idea. A lot talked about the [unclear 01:07:34], as I mentioned. They also talked about different topics. They wanted more on non-technical issues, like the impact of social media, cloud computing, so they wanted

more policy issues coming in. Some actually suggested having a specific technical school and another which is non-technical.

This is something to look at maybe for the future, and how to move forward. What they all also agreed up on was that it was a good networking environment, which I think is a success of the whole program. Thank you.

BAHER ESMAT:

Okay, thank you Christine. I hope that we've provided some key highlights of what's going on in the region, in terms of initiatives, events, projects. I'll open the floor for questions and comments. We still have 15 minutes. We'd like to hear from you as well. Please introduce yourself for the remote participation. Thank you.

SPEAKER:

[Riva Geluz 01:08:45], Tunisian ICT Association. Thank you Baher for giving this opportunity to get some highlights on what's going on in the Middle East region. Please allow me to congratulate the team leaders for all these achievements over only one year. I understand that many big efforts have been made in order to get these achievements. I have, if you allow me, three remarks.

The first one is the only place where IPv6 appears is related to when talking about human resources and capacity building. Frankly speaking, I don't think IPv6 is just a matter of human resources and capacity building. It's a matter of strategy, and for the time being I have no feeling that in any one of the Arab countries there is real strategy for

IPv4 to IPv6 migration. I think that we should get some more efforts in this field. Probably there are some actions, but I'm not aware of them.

The second remark and comment is that when we look at this review of the achievements, the first feeling I've got is that the Middle East – understandable to the Middle East – stops at the borders of Egypt, between Egypt and Libya. I know that this matches with the strict understanding of the Middle East. However now we're talking – even [Esqua 01:10:49] is talking about Morocco, Tunisia and other countries, becoming members of the [Esqua].

I think that now the common understanding is that the Middle East starts from Morocco and even Mauritania, and stops in Pakistan. I think that we have some efforts to do, in order to have a wider view of what may be the ICANN role in the region. I think that now we are in a situation where we cannot accept exclusion, neither of a country nor of a region, and even a sub-region. We should take into consideration this comment, and have very clear, oriented activities for North Africa.

I know and I understand that there is the barrier of language, but ICANN has respected this barrier of language for French-speaking African countries. Why don't we accept these barriers for the Arab region, for the Middle East? I draw your attention to this point, and I think it is a very, very serious issue for our countries in North Africa.

I understand that you don't know about the Tunisian experience in terms of multistakeholderism. Since September 2012 we created the multistakeholder model for the IGF in Tunisia, with a strict understanding of multistakeholderism. We had elections in March 2013.

We organized a pre-event in order to prepare Net Mundial. We organized a local hub in order to follow the Net Mundial activities.

I don't understand. This is not quoted at all. It is as if we didn't exist. Is it a lack of information? Is it a lack of interest? What is it exactly? I have to understand. I am a Member of the Arab MAG. I am a Member of the Tunisian MAG, and I am very much involved in African IGF activities. I have the right to understand what is going on. Please, I need some answers, and more than these answers, I need facts in the future. Thank you.

BAHER ESMAT:

Thank you [unclear 01:13:42]. I'll react to your second and third comments. Very valid comments. I'm sure other colleagues will address your remark about IPv6. On the region thing – and maybe this needed some explanation at the beginning, because it appeared on some slides – but when we say “Middle East” the exact term in fact is “Middle East and adjoining countries”.

This is the term that the Working Group has invented to ensure that it is not the typical Middle East, but it also includes all Arab countries, including those in Africa, as well as Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. This is number one. The Middle East does not mean the traditional Middle East, so it does not stop in Egypt. Two, you are absolutely right, and this is my bad. I forgot to mention the Tunisian IGF when I talked about the national multistakeholder initiatives.

Though ICANN was invited and did participate in the Tunisian IGF event last year. It's not a lack of knowledge or lack of understanding, it's my

bad. In fact, two of our very good friends from Tunisia, [unclear 01:14:57] have been Members of the Middle East Strategy Working Group and they have provided a lot of knowledge and information about what’s going on in Tunisia. They contributed to the work of the Working Group.

These are my quick reactions. I’m happy to take this further with you after the session, because we’ve participated in this last year, as ICANN, in two key events in Tunisia, and the invitation actually came from the Tunisian community. So we cannot neither ignore nor forget this fact. There was another comment on IPv5. I realize there are experts in the room on this subject who can address the topic, if they have any comments to add. Mohamed?

MOHAMED EL BASHIR:

I just want to agree that the IPv6 strategy needs to be comprehensive enough to include different stakeholders in terms of the migration, in terms that it should have training, [unclear 01:16:11], and it should have technical elements as well. One of the examples that we can put forward is the example of the IPv6 National Strategy for Qatar. If you go to ictqatar.qa and you type in “IPv6” you will find the strategies available there.

The strategy is addressing different stakeholders needs. It includes planning, training and implementation as well, and it’s planned for a period of between three to five years. IPv6 is not just a technical transition. It has different elements as well. This is one of the examples you can see and maybe try to amend.

BAHER ESMAT: Thank you Mohamed. I have Paul, Nabil, John, and I also would like to invite Fouad, who's going to speak a little bit about the capacity building effort. Paul?

PAUL RENDEK: Good afternoon everyone. My name is Paul Rendek and I'm from the RIPE NCC, located in the Dubai office. Firstly I'd like to say that we opened up our new office doors with a team of four people now, in Dubai, so we feel that we have what we need to move forward. We're staffed up with Arabs from the region, that speak Arabic, to their fellow Arabs in the region. I think it's fantastic. That's the first thing I wanted to announce.

When my colleague here mentioned the IPv6 and what's going on there, there are probably a lot of initiatives that you may not be aware of, but I'd like to run through some of them. The Train the Trainer Program, that you saw mentioned here, is something that the RIPE NCC is currently working on, together with three governments, to get off the ground, specifically in IPv6. That is something we're doing jointly with Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and the UAE.

I think very soon you'll see a Train the Trainer Program specifically targeted towards the Middle East, training local Arabs to be able to train Arabs. This is the important thing. I can tell you that we have an initiative right now called the IPv6 roadshow, that we actually provide in the Middle East region to government network operators. We provide this to them free of charge.

We're [retraining 01:18:13] hands-on training to government network operators, because they are the leaders in the region, and we felt that this was something the technical community could give in a capacity building way. It's popular. We feel that it's successful. We're working with the governments to even tailor the courses further to what they want to see.

Also moving along with enterprise, we see government and enterprise coming together to these meetings. That is an initiative that is there. I could point you to the websites, if you would like to have that extended beyond what we call the general Middle East region. I'm sure we'd be happy to work with AfriNIC to provide this kind of training beyond the classic Middle East sense.

The last thing is that with the new set of staff that we have, we are targeting the [sea level 01:18:58] in engagement, because the technical community inside the Arab world understands what's going on. It's the [sea level] that needs to make the decisions here, at these organizations. This is the part where we think we need to do a little bit more outreach, and I hope that we can do that together with some of our colleagues here on this Panel.

The last thing is that I wanted to say that there are some rick Task Forces going on inside the region. We heard the one from Qatar, of which I know that when they were doing their strategy plan they did approach the technical community. They approached the RIPE NCC. We are very much in-tow with what they're doing. Saudi Arabia has a very rich Task Force.

I can say that if you want to look at countries that have good models for v6 and their strategies going forward, I would look at Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon, from the Middle East region. Thank you.

NABIL BENAMAR:

My name is Nabil Benamar. I'm from Morocco. I collaborate with MENOG in IPv6 roadshows, so I'd like to just say that with them I'm an IPv6 trainer, and we contact a lot of roadshows, workshops in the Middle East. It was really successful, especially in that a lot of demand comes from Saudi Arabia, KSA, Qatar and Dubai.

So we can see that there are some good results, and you can see that, for example, in the [unclear 01:20:33].com statistics, the real IPv6 deployment in this region. For example, I can see that the presentation of IPv6 deployment in KSA and in Canada, for example, is the same. It's around 20% of IPv6 deployment in this region. So it's a really good example of what MENOG is doing with this initiative of roadshows.

It will be a really good opportunity and initiative to extend these roadshows to the other Arab countries, especially Maghreb countries; Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and so on. It would be great to enhance this IPv6 deployment in this region. The last time we did it in KSA in May. The host was STC, and it was for the first time that we deployed the core network of this operator IPv6 connectivity. It was a real IPv6 connectivity for all the participants.

I also join Mohamed for the examples that he said about it being a multistakeholder approach. If we want real deployment of IPv6, sensitize all the stakeholders about the real need of IPv6. It's not just

about addresses, but also about applications that don't deal with IPv4 because of [nat 01:22:19]. More talks. Not only training. Training is a need, is a must, but it's not sufficient.

BAHER ESMAT: Thank you Nabil. John?

JOHN LAPRISE: My name is John Laprise. I'm a professor at North Western University in Qatar. I also consult on occasion for ICT Qatar. I taught at the SIG, which was a fantastic experience, so thank you for having me. I've been in Qatar for five years. Hearing the discussion here today, it strikes me that there's no other region linked by a script that is so diverse. You have everything, whether you're talking about wealth, population, demographics.

This region is very, very different. No two countries even come close to being similar. I would urge ICANN, especially in this Working Group, to look at triaging the region in a country-by-country basis. Not all countries can, for instance, proceed with developing e-commerce. They don't have the underlying financial logistical infrastructure. You can have all the technology you want, and you're not going to be able to facilitate e-commerce.

What needs to happen is triaging each country individually to see what in capacities can you develop in those places, and work towards those ends. There are many of these underlying factors that we, as ICANN,

have no control over, and we just have to react to the situation on the ground.

It would behoove ICANN to look closely at the individual countries within this region and do a triage to see what you can actually do, how you can actually help, in those countries. Thank you.

BAHER ESMAT: Thanks John. I'll give the floor to Fouad, and then I see [Mona 01:24:22] wants to make an intervention. Fouad?

FOUAD BAJWA: Thank you Baher. Fouad Bajwa. I come from Pakistan, and I'm on the Board of the Asia Pacific Region At-Large Organization. I had the opportunity to contribute to the Middle Eastern and adjoining countries' School on Internet Governance, and I was also an instructor. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to be there. I had the opportunity to propose certain ideas in the design of the program.

Something we focused on was to cover the basics of Internet governance, and then moving to issues that effect Internet governance and impact the region. Some of the things we focused on was that we were not throwing in lots of global information and lots of noise into the program. We tried our best to bring issues into discussion, which were in line with the nature of the Internet across the 33 countries of the Middle Eastern and adjoining countries region.

Some of the things that we noted was that the school was organized in a very short period of time. There are some things that, for the future, we

might be looking at. The unique feature of the school is that it's a rotating school. It moves. It's not dependent on one country. Something that could be anticipated might be that we move beyond the Gulf countries and move into Northern Africa, and give the opportunity further for organizations to partner with us and help organize the school.

Another important aspect of the school was, I believe, breaking the ice, because despite people speaking the same language but coming from different countries of the region, there needs to be ice-breaking. The way the Internet is governed in every country varies, and in order for people to have a dialogue in such a manner that the lesser the differences, the more the openness for dialogue, I think we were able to achieve that a lot.

We were able to stimulate a lot of queries from the participants, and we were able to address various questions. One thing was that the language of the school is in English language, but when necessary, terms were also explained in Arabic language. One has to realize that the school is part of the [unclear 01:27:22] region activities, and let's say for Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran, these are countries that don't speak Arabic or understand Arabic.

This is very important, that the sense of globalization also exists within the design of the school. The school is unique in the sense that it does build upon the successes – I want to say best practices, but successes – of other schools on Internet governance across the world. The fact being that most of the faculty has had experience of [running 01:27:56] those schools.

Even beyond the traditional remit of the Internet governance community, the faculty also has academic experience and research, or let's say pragmatic experience, of regulation and policy practicing. That really adds value that these are not just people from academia. These are people who've performed roles in actual policies, who have played important roles within the global Internet policies.

When that interaction is developed with the community from the [unclear 01:28:33] region, it creates a junction point where we can explore issues of common interest, which span the region. The DNS industry is an important aspect, but to have that discussion in such a manner that people can understand the social economic behavior of this ecosystem, I think we were successfully able to share that.

Some of the feedback that I received from the participants is very much in line with what John and Christine shared – that there is a huge level of interest, and to do more deep diving into Internet governance issues, and Internet governance per se. People enjoy the aspect of the industry. I think for the future schools we may explore helping them look at the industry in a more interested manner.

One thing that this also relayed was that... Raf Fatani is also over here. He also certainly helped us facilitate the IGF simulations. All the activities that were being done as part of the School on Internet Governance, they were actually simulating some activity. For example, when we were doing a discussion panel, it was similar to the ones that are done at the IGF through workshops.

When we were doing the MAG simulation it actually had people who had served on the MAG, and it actually had people who had been part of managing the IGF Secretariats. We could really frame that field of how those things were being done. These were not simulations that went on and on. These were free-stop displays. The simulations would stop and they'd explain why those transitions, views, diversities in view and exchange of views were happening.

The feedback I had regarding the simulations was that all the participants enjoyed that. There was a lot of cross-questioning. There was a lot of sharing of ideas and knowledge, and I think in the future we'll be looking at suggesting to the Organizing Team of the [unclear 01:30:56] School of Internet Governance, that we can introduce the possibility that we have a longer time to promote the program across the region.

We also introduce people who want to join in but that contribute, say, fees, so that we can bring in more people from the developing countries, increase the participation and we can grow larger in what we're doing. Thank you so much.

BAHER ESMAT:

Thank you Fouad. Now I have [Mona], Sophie and then Paul.

[MONA]:

Thanks Baher, and thanks to all the Panel. It's [Mona Alshahad]. I'm a professor of law. I'm here as a Member of the Francophone Group. I will not speak in French, because I don't see any translators. My

question is maybe technical, I don't know. I'm here to follow up this initiative and its development, and to write a report for the Francophone, so we can benefit from this initiative's success.

The question is, is there any other reference – I'm sorry, when I write I need to go to build on references... What you have exposed here – sorry to say this – but it's like saying, "We did this, we did that. We don't have any figures. We don't indicators. We don't have any concrete things." If the initiative or activity succeeds, how can we tell? Is there any reference that I can use? That's what I need – references, documents, whatever, other than this presentation. That's it. Thank you.

BAHER ESMAT:

Thank you [Mona]. Very good point. Surprisingly, we do have a reference. We didn't put it on the screen. It's a very detailed document. The link is on the presentation, and the document comes in two parts. The first part is like a table that goes through all the actions that were recommended to be implemented. Against each action it says what's been achieved and what has not been achieved.

There is a link to this document in the presentation. The document is posted online. The other part of the document actually has all the metrics. When the Working Group developed the strategy, they developed metrics to be able to assess what's being accomplished. Against each item you can see the metrics and the progress made. Okay, now I have Sophie?

SOPHIE MADDENS:

Thank you Beran. Thank you to the Working Group for a great presentation, and indeed for their great work. I've been honored to be participating with you over the last couple of years, working with a great team and indeed with all of the ISTAR community. For example, through the MENOG, through capacity building training, IPv6, DNSSEC, ISP work, etcetera. The list goes on and on.

As an example, as you mentioned, the DNS Forum with ICANN back in February, was a great event. We worked with the ISTAR, with PIR and [unclear 01:34:45]. I think it was interesting as well, and it brings me to the point of the gentleman from Tunisia. We, like ICANN, brought in people from other regions, to look at their experiences, to look at their technical input into the DNS Forum event.

We brought in a number of our Chapter Members from Africa in particular to see how we could share the experiences. I wanted to build on the point from the gentleman from Tunisia, because like ICANN, we, ISOC... I just want to introduce myself. My name is Sophie Maddens. I'm Senior Director of Global Services of the Internet Society.

For the last year or so we've been looking at how to work with the community, but build and enhance our presence in the region. We put out a wide questionnaire to all the Arab-speaking countries in the Gulf, in the Middle East, and in North Africa. The results from the questionnaire towards ISOC was that the North African countries in particular wanted to stay with our African Bureau, for a number of reasons.

However, as came out during this discussion, obviously there are issues that we will continue to work together on, and our regions do work together. We don't close our events one from the other, so it is a collaboration cooperation. In the case of ISOC, when we look at the Middle East, it's the Gulf and the Levant. As we say, there's no reason not to work together.

So when there are issues, like on the ISP work – and we have been very fortunate and honored to be with you in Tunisia in a number of events and working with you in some of your workshops – the regions can work together.

I also want to say that through our own ISOC INET events, which we've had in Qatar and Lebanon, and hopefully in Bahrain in the future, we're looking forward to doing more in the region with our partners, and focusing on these key issues, such as Internet governance, such as the technical issues, such as the policy issues. I just wanted to add that to this. Thank you.

BAHER ESMAT: Thanks Sophie. Paul?

PAUL RENDEK: Thank you very much for giving me the chance to speak again. I wanted to say that I probably spat out quite a lot of information there about maybe what the RIPE NCC's footprint is currently in the Middle East. What I did want to say here though is that if there's anybody who has any other suggestions about cooperation, I'm very much open to hear

about this. I can say that we've boosted up our resources and we're ready to work with the community in the Middle East.

The second thing I wanted to say was very much touching on what our colleague, Ali, had mentioned, about the fact that we had no applicants from the GCC. In fact, I see this as probably not only as something that's isolated to the SIG, but we see this in other areas, like MENOG. I'm often wondering – and I think we all know – that from the GCC countries we have quite a colorful set of inhabitants. They're not always all local.

I think one of the things that I'm trying to work on is that yes, it's great, I am one of them that's living in the region. I'm not from the region. I think one of the issues that I have is that it's very difficult for me to find, from the GCC, the engagement of how I reach the locals from those GCC countries to participate in things like MENOGs or things like the SIGs.

I really am hoping that we can work a little closer with the governments, because I think these are the folks that are going to help us reach the local citizens, to make sure that they are engaging in moving forward and making sure they have a robust Internet. I am calling for that. I do want that noted. I hope we can put that on the agenda moving forward.

The second thing I wanted to do, fantastic work. I have followed this Working Group. I think that out of all the areas of ICANN, I have to say that I'm very proud to have seen the outcome of the documentation, and the workings you're actually doing to reach the things you've pointed out. Well done folks, because I think everybody else can take note from you in the other regions. Certainly the Europeans. I'll be working with them on this next. Well done.

I do want to stress that while I see a lot of great stuff going on in the domain area, and I can see that's in your plans and I'm happy to see that, the areas of standards – WC3 and IETF engagement – from folks from the Middle East is way too low. We need to work on picking this up. I had to actually push folks from the region to go to the IETF, which as a Fellowship, which would include folks from the Middle East.

I literally have to call people up and get them to go to these IETF meetings to engage. I'm happy to continue to do so, but we need to sustain this on a different level. The other piece I wanted to add is obviously the area of MENOG and having a rich NOG is something that I think is important for the Arabs, and I want to continue to have this in your strategy, as well as Arab IGF and Arab INET, in these sorts of forums. Thank you.

BAHER ESMAT:

Thank you Paul. I realize that we're running over time. I see one request from the floor. This is going to be the last one. We'll make it very quick. Then we'll have to conclude. Rafid, you have the floor.

RAFID FATANI:

Thank you Baher. I just want to throw this out. I'll be very quick. I'm not sure if this is the right fora for this, but I wanted to know from Sophie, when we had great spiel on engagement in the Middle East, there is a reason why there's very little Middle Eastern engagement with regards to ISOC. I think just the fact that there is an open position for the Arab Director, that's been open for over a year, nothing has happened, shows somewhat of a lack of engagement.

I think with regards to these two strategy groups, the lack of engagement of ICANN with these two groups I think showcases something. I don't know if this is something that's been overlooked, or if there's something more deep-rooted there. I don't know. Just a very quick follow-up point with regards to the GCC region engagement, that Ali brought up – again, very briefly.

Some of the fellowships that we all mention is great, but actually, a lot of these fellowships have standards, and the standards usually look at the World Bank standard, in terms of incomes and in terms of eligibility. A lot of GCC nationals are not legible to these things, and therefore that makes engagement very difficult. Yes, these are very rich countries, but it does mean there's disengagement with poor people within rich countries.

I know this isn't an issue that's very specific to the GCC. There's a wider issue that needs to be discussed here, but this is one of the reasons why the GCC fails with regards to engagement. Thank you.

BAHER ESMAT:

Thank you Rafid. Fahd is going to read out one comment from a remote participant, and then we're going to close it. Thanks.

FAHD BATAYNEH:

We have a comment from remote participation, from Mr. [Nabil ? 01:42:18] from Lebanon. He says: "We should source the next generation leaders from among the university students."

BAHER ESMAT:

Okay. With that, I thank you very much for coming. We're running over time. I know there are more discussions we want to continue, but we can continue that offline. Thank you once again, and please join me in thanking my fellow Panelists. Thank you. [Applause]

[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]