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Speech to
Arab Telecommunication and Information
Council of Ministers
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Excellency Dr. Amr Salem, Minister of Telecommunications and Technology of Syria.

Excellency Dr. Tarek Kamel, Minister of Communications and Information Technology of Egypt.

Excellencies Ministers.

Heads of Delegations, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Before I start, I'd like to extend special gratitude to the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and to his Excellency, Dr. Amr Salem, Minister of Telecommunications and Technology of Syria, for allowing me the opportunity to address this distinguished meeting of the Arab Telecommunication and Information Council of Ministers.

I would also like to express my great pleasure at being invited to talk to you about strategic issues facing ICANN, especially with regard to our efforts to continue to strengthen ICANN as a multi-stakeholder model reflective of the Internet's needs, enable greater multilingualism

internationally, and continue our commitment towards the transition of improved internationalisation.

ICANN's Multi-stakeholder environment

Internet users around the world have come to rely increasingly on the Internet's global system of unique identifiers, including the domain name space, to communicate, transact business, transfer and store data, and gather together in virtual communities. Users demand greater functionality and more multilingual content and access, wherever we are.

This growth will become even more dynamic with the deployment of top level internationalised domain names — that is, domain names using characters other than a through z and 0 through 9 and the hyphen — and the transition from IPv4, or Internet Protocol version 4, to IPv6, Internet Protocol version 6. These and other initiatives that are intended to improve openness, accessibility, diversity, and security demonstrate that the Internet stakeholders, including stakeholders in this region, are working hard to make the Internet truly global.

Since the domain name system's beginnings in the early 1980s, cooperation and consensus building through a multi-stakeholder model have successfully guided the Internet's rapid evolution and innovation while maintaining its global interoperability, security and stability.

A continuation of this global approach — based on the 35 years of the experience and values of technologists that created the Internet of today so as to ensure redundancy and resiliency — would, in my opinion, deliver the most satisfactory results for the interests of all users of the Internet.

As an internationally organised, multi-stakeholder non-profit organization, ICANN seeks to reflect these values of coordination, cooperation and collaboration.

ICANN's Governmental Advisory Committee

ICANN's Governmental Advisory Committee, or GAC, plays an important role in ICANN's work — it advises the ICANN Board on public policy issues relating to the Internet. The Committee, currently made up of about 100 members and 10 observers representing the geographic and developmental diversity of governments around the world, is very ably led by its Chairman, Ambassador Janis Karklins, Permanent Representative of Latvia to the United Nations, and by three vice chairs.

The GAC not only advises the ICANN Board on public policy issues, but it also raises issues of concern to governments, especially in matters that may intersect between ICANN policies and national laws or international agreements. Your participation in this forum is important — as it must reflect, and keep pace, with Internet dynamics.

The GAC is now deliberating on several issues of interest to the global Internet community. One is formulating guidance for the introduction of internationalised domain names, or IDNs, particularly as they relate to country code top-level domains, or ccTLDs. I will touch on this more shortly. Another is the prospect of IPv4 exhaustion and best practices for incorporating the next technology, IPv6, into the Internet concurrently with the present IPv4 system.

Recent achievements by the GAC encompass such high-profile issues as defining the principles for the delegation and management of country code top level domains. It also has had considerable input to the discussions at the World Summit on the Information Society.

Internationalised Domain Names

Maintaining a stable interoperable Internet is essential, as is a global multilingual Internet. A multilingual Internet involves very importantly multilingual content as well as, in relation to Internet domain name system, the internationalised domain names, or IDNs. It is worth noting that there is already considerable content in the World Wide Web that is written in a large number of scripts drawn from the Unicode system. Domain names are the next area for expansion.

ICANN has been doing considerable work in the area of IDNs, together with technical and other respective stakeholders. Many in this region are engaged in this process, and are equally involved and interested in seeing the implementation of IDNs.

As you know, the issue of IDNs is in of itself complex — with multiple issues both technical and policy. There are many scripts and associated languages around the world that need to be accommodated in the implementation of IDNs, including the Arabic script.

ICANN is entering into the next phase of technical testing steps to enable this implementation, and will soon release a facility to evaluate at least 11 top-level domains having internationalised labels live in the DNS root zone, including the Arabic script. These domains will not have any economic value and will be for technical testing purposes only — but they will be a significant step towards the ultimate full implementation of globally resolving IDN top level domains.

At the just completed ICANN meeting, from which I have travelled directly, and where over 1000 people from 115 countries participated, the members of the Governmental Advisory Committee and the Country Code Names Supporting Organisation extensively discussed identifying a way to

use an interim approach to IDN ccTLDs associated with the ISO 3166-1 two-letter codes to meet near-term demands and to gain experience with mechanisms for selection and authorization of such TLDs that can inform a policy development process aimed at creating an overall long-term policy.

Consequently, the Board resolved to request that the ICANN community, including the respective supporting organizations, including the GAC, to continue to work collaboratively, taking the technical limitations and requirement into consideration, to explore both an interim and an overall approach to IDN ccTLDs associated with the ISO 3166-1 two-letter codes and recommend a course of action to the Board in a timely manner.

This has been a practical illustration of governments, country code operators, technical experts and the ICANN Board members working together in a spirit of enhanced cooperation to address a complex but important technical challenge for the global Internet.

ICANN's work is progressing rapidly in this area, and input and participation from the Arab region is critical in this process — both by governments and country code operators. All of our work, together, for IDN deployment is intended to maintain global uniqueness together with continued interoperability of the domain name system — unique domain names with the same functionality regardless of the geographic point of access.

ICANN as an organization and the future

ICANN's responsibilities are global. As an essential part of its work, ICANN will continue to develop and improve processes and procedures to encourage enhanced transparency and accountability in the adoption of policies related to its function. Along with the Internet, ICANN and its

constituencies are maturing, adopting best practice business initiatives and planning strategically for the future.

In complementing this process, a recent report by ICANN's President Strategy Committee acknowledged ICANN's existing international character, and encouraged the Board to further explore with the international community appropriate mechanisms for reviewing ICANN's legal identity and functions to potentially enhance this international character.

Excellencies Ministers —

Ladies and Gentlemen —

The Internet is the most powerful and pervasive means of empowering individuals in recent human history. It is becoming part of the glue that ensures a rapid unleashing and sharing of humanity's knowledge and possibilities for all persons no matter their age, sex, class, ethnicity and — at least in some degree — wealth. And it is radically breaking down the obstacles to a global community.

It requires the continuing efforts of all stakeholders, from governments, the business and private sectors, academia, and civil society to preserve and strengthen this model. By doing so, we can ensure the resiliency and utility of the Internet — and guarantee the rapid and successful development of a secure, stable, and globally interoperable Internet.

I would like to conclude with my strong recognition and continued welcoming of the participation of yourselves and this region in the work of ICANN and its processes. I am confident that the effective participation of the Arab community will greatly and positively contribute to the ICANN

process, and will bring valuable and novel views to the dialogue from which the global community can benefit.

Finally, allow me once again to express my personal delight at being invited to this distinguished meeting, and my sincere appreciation to the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic for allowing me this opportunity.

Thank you.