

Transcription of Vint Cerf Address at the Welcome Ceremony of the 40th ICANN Meeting

San Francisco, California, USA, 14 March 2011

Good morning, everyone. It is a real pleasure to come back and see so many faces -- familiar faces. And I hope to meet some new ones as well. It feels like a long time since I stepped down as chairman only three years ago. Peter, I appreciate very much your undertaking the task of leading this organization further into the future.

I'd like to respond momentarily to something -- two things that Ira mentioned. First of all, Jon Postel's responsibility as the IANA actually started much, much earlier. He was first the numbers czar starting in 1969 when the ARPANET was underway and Steve Crocker issued the first request for comment. Jon undertook to keep track of a lot of the protocol parameters and the allocations of address space back then. And then as time went on, as the Internet TCP/IP protocols were used, he expanded that role. So he had been doing a function like this for a good fraction of his career.

The other observation, I appreciate very much your comments, but I have to tell you that -- remind you anyway that Esther Dyson was the first chairman of ICANN and undertook that role because nobody else would. She was an impressive act to follow as I assumed the role in 2000. And second, Mike Roberts, of course, acted as the first CEO. I did have the pleasure of participating in the inaugural meeting of the board at which Esther was elected and Mike Roberts was confirmed as CEO. I was not a member of the board at that time. I was simply a visitor.

Finally, I wanted to make an observation -- a generic observation about why the Internet and all the institutions surrounding it have managed to function as -- despite all the stromengen (phonetic). That's because they are very loosely coupled. This whole system is designed around relatively loose coupling and standardization. If it were not for that, I think it would be easily too brittle to survive. So this loose coupling of organizations and networks and protocols and everything else really has given it a longevity that it couldn't otherwise have.

I, too, represent the dinosaur period in history, so I'm the second talking dinosaur. No insult intended, Ira. But I do want to mention a few things about the history, not only of ICANN but of Internet in general and the United States' role in it. The project began with support from the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency in 1973 and, in fact, preceding that, it was the ARPANET Project starting in 1968. But as time went on, responsibility for this system devolved from DARPA to the Defense Communications Agency which is now called DISA and then to the National Science Foundation and then ultimately to the Department of Commerce. And in those transitions, the United States government reduced its position, its authority, its decision-making activity with regard to Internet. This is a continuous, essentially, relegation or delegation of responsibility away from the government and into the private sector. You can see some of this evidenced in the relationships between the Department of Commerce and ICANN which began with a procurement contract for the IANA function and Memorandum of Understanding. The procurement contract still exists. The Memorandum of Understanding has been replaced by an Affirmation of Commitments that evolved out of the interactions of ICANN, the Department of Commerce and ICANN's general operation. So this creation of ICANN that Ira played such a key role in has continued on a track towards privatization of the Internet's infrastructure and the public-private policy development which is part of the ICANN process today.

So I don't want to spend a great deal of time this morning -- I know we have a lot to do, but I wanted to offer a few thoughts that come to mind about the immediate future.

There exists, as you know, a procurement contract and I believe that that concept of procuring service from ICANN really ought to change to become a cooperative agreement because I believe that format expresses more correctly the relationship between ICANN and the Department of Commerce. I still think that such an agreement is useful and, therefore, would not resist it, but I believe that a procurement contract is an overly rigid structure through which to express the relationship between the Department of Commerce and ICANN.

The second thing I want to remind you of is RFC 2860 which is dated June 2000. It was authored by the Internet Architecture Board, the Internet Engineering Task Force, or leaders thereof, and ICANN. That RFC memorializes an MOU that was signed in March -- March 1st, 2000, 11 years ago, between the IETF and ICANN. And it was ratified by the ICANN board on March 10th of the year 2000. And it concerns the delegation of responsibility for recording and memorializing Internet protocol parameters and documenting what those parameters are. The responsibility for what those parameters are evolve out of the IETF standardization process. The Internet Architecture Board delegated the responsibility for managing that process to -- initially to IANA and then subsequently to ICANN. And that memorandum establishes that relationship. Those responsibilities for managing the parameter space are distinct from the allocation of Internet addresses which has been assigned to ICANN specifically and thence from ICANN to the Regional Internet Registries and the Number Resource Organization. That's distinct from the Internet parameters. And, finally, the general global allocation policies for Internet addresses is a bottom-up process developed by the RIRs and confirmed by the ICANN board.

One thing about the technical standards of the Internet is a guiding philosophy from the IETF will serve as well. If you are going to do something, pick one way to do it, not several ways to do it. This philosophy has contributed to the interoperability that has been the hallmark of the Internet design from the earliest stages and I think it is a very wise philosophy to follow. We can see occasions where parties might decide for a variety of reasons that two standards might be a good idea. Generally speaking, that leads to the possibility that parties will pick the opposite standard and not be able to interwork. So I would strongly urge that you think about that as you put policies together.

I want to echo something that Ira said, which I believe is very important to the health of ICANN, and that's to strive to increase transparency of and to explain the rationale for policy decisions arising out of the ICANN process, particularly out of any board deliberations. I think there was an attempt to initiate that during board votes where board members were permitted to speak to the rationale behind their decisions, but I think that process could be refined substantially. This kind of transparency helps, as Ira points out, in cases where there is disagreement with a conclusion, at least one can follow the logic leading to a particular conclusion.

I think that the Governmental Advisory Committee could usefully enhance its public policy input to the policy development process. It's already established a long history of discussion and contribution to policy making in the ICANN process. But I would like to encourage increased amount of attention to raising policy issues not only before the board but also before other parts of the ICANN organization. So I'm very happy to see, at least during my tenure, that the Government Advisory Committee has been meeting -- had been meeting and I hope continues to meet with other parts of the ICANN structure, the other supporting organizations, the Security and Stability Advisory Committee and so on in order to both raise public policy issues before those supporting organizations and also to hear from them what kinds of issues are arising that might have public policy aspects to them.

There are a very broad range of policy issues that are not solely within the purview of ICANN and its multistakeholder framework. Law enforcement, international commercial frameworks, intellectual property protection, freedom of expression, access to Internet services, freedom from harm, all of these policy matters lie at least beyond, perhaps overlapping with, but beyond the purview of ICANN. It is very important, I think, not to imagine that ICANN alone can deal with all the policy issues that the existence of

the Internet poses and that ICANN is a part of a universe of policy-making necessity but that there are other organizations that have a role to play. So somehow ICANN has to fit itself into that policy ecosystem in a way which is constructive. And here I believe that collaboration is key among the very many stakeholders to assure that the Internet operation continues to foster innovation and protect the legitimate rights and interests of countries, corporations and individuals. Sovereignty of nations notwithstanding, achieving these goals requires cooperation among all who partake of the growing ubiquity of the Internet. Let me emphasize that cooperation and collaboration is absolutely essential among all of the stakeholders in order to achieve successful policy outcomes.

If ever there were a time when the multistakeholder model needs to be embraced, it's now, with so much at stake to allow the Internet to expand in its scale and functionality. This notion has to be preserved in future incarnations of the Internet Governance Forum or further exploration of the notion of a global information society. There are pressures to move away from a multistakeholder structure in the IGF, for example, and to adopt a more intergovernmental multilateral model. I strongly urge against this because there are too many valuable points of view that must be incorporated into any consideration of policy for Internet growth. Ultimately, the challenge for ICANN and other organizations dealing with Internet policy is to preserve multistakeholder values and the single interoperational Internet within the context of the traditional notion of national autonomy. I believe that collaboration and cooperation among governments and between national and international institutions are fundamental to achieving these goals. The Internet has been a grand collaboration and it is up to us to preserve this value for all Internauts present and future. Thank you very much.