

ETNO Reflection Document on Taking stock of the Sharm El Sheikh meeting and preparing for the IGF 2010 Meeting



January 2010

Executive Summary

ETNO and its members are fully committed to the IGF process and participate in both the preparatory open consultations and the IGF meetings. This document contributes to the discussions on Taking Stock of the Sharm El Sheikh IGF meeting, as well as to the preparation of the 5th IGF meeting in Lithuania, ahead of the open consultation in Geneva (9 February 2010). The document indicates what worked well in Sharm and what not, as well as it contains suggestions for Vilnius.

General comments

ETNO¹ and its members are grateful to the Government and the people of Egypt for hosting the 4th meeting of the IGF in Sharm El Sheikh. We highly appreciate the work, effort and time put by the IGF Secretariat and the IGF Executive Coordinator Mr. Kummer, the MAG members and Chair Mr. Desai, as well as the Egyptian organisers and staff, in general all who contributed to the organization and overall success of the 4th IGF meeting.

Some of our members attended the IGF in person, whilst others participated remotely. Based on our experiences we wish to make the following comments on the Sharm meeting:

¹. The European Telecommunications Network Operators' Association represents 41 members, which are providers of networks over fixed and mobile systems and have substantial Internet operations in 35 countries. ETNO and its members have been working for many years on a range of policy issues associated with the information society, including the World Summit on Information Society process and Internet governance. More information about ETNO can be found at: www.etno.eu

Taking Stock of the Sharm El Sheikh meeting

The meeting itself confirmed that the IGF is unique as it brings together all stakeholders and gives them the opportunity to discuss all important Internet governance related issues, something that no other Forum or organisation neither does nor can do. The participation this year, which was larger than in any previous IGF, as well as the diversity of participants, proves that more and more people find the IGF useful and worth it, and thus become involved.

The overall theme of the Sharm IGF “Creating Opportunities for all” proved quite proper. ETNO appreciated the fact that the programme of the main sessions (even incomplete) was presented earlier than in other years. We also appreciate the calls for merging and finalizing the various workshops early enough.

Regarding the format of the Sharm El Sheikh IGF, which included main sessions, workshops and other meetings, ETNO finds that while the set-up worked well in general, certain changes (or rather adjustments) are necessary for the next IGF in order to reflect the experience gained in previous meetings as well as the evolution of Internet governance issues.

We found the two main session novelties of “Setting the scene” (orientation) and “Regional Perspectives” most useful, with high added value, and hence worth repeating. As for the “Opening Ceremony” and “Opening session,” while we understand that a formal part well justifies its existence, we believe that the number of speakers and the duration of each speech, particularly in the second part, were very time-consuming, so that at least the “Opening session” needs rethinking.

The main session on Critical Internet Resources served well its purpose. Having co-moderating experts instead of panellists or designated speakers worked very well and resulted in a lively discussion.

The main session on “Security, Openness and Privacy” with a few panellists and then discussion from the floor also worked well. However, the subtopics were too many and diverse, which made it impossible to cover all issues adequately. ETNO had suggested less subtopics for this session, while respecting the principle that anything relevant can be discussed. The main session on “Access and Diversity” actually entailed two different sessions. Furthermore, at given moments of both main sessions there was a feeling of “déjà vu.” Thus, these two main sessions need restructuring with a view to achieving more focus, better organisation and/or coordination and perhaps less time.

The “Internet Governance in the light of WSIS Principles” main session was a late addition to the programme, which in our opinion responded to a temporary need to fill in a schedule gap. It could have

been a workshop and the slot could have been left open, or used more wisely (as another slot for the "Taking Stock" formal consultation). We think that this session does not need to be repeated next year as a main one.

The "Taking Stock" main session was the most important in our view, as after all, it was about the future of the IGF. It is rather unfortunate that the - literally - last minute addition of the host country honorary session negatively affected the whole programme (even workshops, as nothing could take place in parallel) of the last day, including the "Taking Stock" session, which was split in two. In any case, it is unfortunate that information about the "Taking Stock" session was not available until a few minutes before the session started. It could have been better organised ahead of time and certainly with more transparency. However, ETNO prefers to stand to the fact that the "Taking Stock" main session served well its purpose and that a strong and clear message about the continuation of the IGF came out. Therefore, the formal consultation with the Forum participants on the desirability of its continuation does not need to be repeated in the next IGF, by which we hope to hear the UN formal Decision on this matter.

As in previous years, the best (and most interesting) part for many was undoubtedly the various workshops, which were independently organized by the meetings' participants. During the four days of its duration, the IGF in Sharm offered an incredible number of meetings on a broad range of subjects. Many participants had to choose between several sessions that were scheduled concurrently. On the negative side, we think that the workshops happening in parallel were still too many. Although this year there was a great attempt to merge workshops, still there was some duplication, and workshops of particular interest (e.g. on Critical Internet Resources) were scheduled at conflicting times. As stated many times before, quality should be preferred over quantity, so that fewer and better workshops would enable better coverage of contents as well as resources' optimization.

This year efforts were strengthened regarding remote participation. We were very pleased to see that real time transcripts were available live for all the discussions in the main room, as well as extensive live streaming (either video or audio) not only from the main room, but also in all other rooms (where workshops and other events took place). This gave the opportunity to those who could not participate physically to follow discussions in real time. However, remote participation was rather invisible or very limited in the discussions. We do not know what the reasons behind this are, but certainly remote participation needs more attention and we would appreciate more feedback from the IGF Secretariat as to what did work or not.

As regards written material, we appreciate that the "Synthesis Paper" became available in a timely manner. We also applauded the introduction of the "Background Paper." In the past we had stressed the necessity of the availability of such paper in as many languages as possible, as it would set the framework of substantive discussions in

the main sessions and prepare the participants. We sincerely hope that the “Background Paper” will be continued and it will become a reference document of the next IGF. Furthermore, the final extensive Chair’s summary gave a well balanced and neutral overview of what happened in Sharm and it was deeply appraised. Given the opportunity, we consider the two books on the proceedings of the first three meetings in Athens, Rio and Hyderabad as great outcomes from the IGF. We hope all workshop organizers will respect the rule and submit a report, if they haven’t done so already, so it can be used for the next book on the proceedings of Sharm.

Additionally, we applaud the improvement of the official IGF site, the updating and the use of social media, such as Twitter and YouTube, which help us stay tuned. We encourage the IGF Secretariat to continue these efforts and to provide updated information.

On a more practical side, the congress hall in Sharm was suitable for such an event. There were adequate rooms with clear indications, free access to the Internet, plugs, PCs for public use; in general there was good technical support. The IGF village was very well located outside the main room. The provision of free lunch and coffee breaks was greatly appreciated by all participants. That being said, the location of hotels and the lack of public transportation were not optimal, although the organizers provided free shuttle service from/to all official hotels in the morning/evening, respectively. Further negatives were on one hand the last minute changes to the programme and on the other the extreme and questionable security restrictions (mobiles and cameras were banned from the entire congress building during the morning of the last day of the IGF, all participants were retained in the main room for some time), which were strange to the UN high security standards.

Suggestions for the Vilnius meeting

ETNO and its members are looking forward to the Vilnius meeting, which should build upon the success of the previous IGF meetings. We reiterate once again that good organization and programming are fundamental. This is particularly important this year, as the IGF will take place earlier than ever, in September 2010. We consider essential that a rough programme (including i.a. content/themes, format/framework of discussions) and a draft schedule for the 5th IGF meeting become available before the second open consultation in May, and that they are finalized by the end of June 2010.

Based on the experiences so far and the current world situation, ETNO suggests that the overall theme of “Creating Opportunities for all” (or another variation of it, without changing/distorting the meaning) is kept, because it is still valid, horizontal and broad enough to cover all discussions. Additionally, ETNO proposes that for the next IGF particular emphasis is given to Internet governance as regards

development, innovation and green ICT which could well be the axes for "Creating opportunities for all."

As for the main sessions, we believe that in addition to the Orientation and Opening sessions the first day and the Emerging Issues and Closing sessions the last day, the next IGF should have only three main sessions on "Critical Internet Resources", "Access/Diversity" (including freedom of speech) and "Security/Openness/Privacy". As a matter of fact, these three main sessions can take place during one half of the day (preferably in the afternoon), so that participants can attend the relevant workshops the other half. This way, main sessions can be really constructive and workshops can build on the previous discussions. In addition, this year's main sessions should be more focused, and in certain cases with less duration, as in Rio. Regarding "Regional Perspectives," in our view this should not be considered as a main session but an Open Forum, which could take place in the main room to take advantage of the facilities there (interpretation, live transcripts, webcast, etc.), but not in conjunction with the Orientation session on the first day.

Experience from Sharm and Hyderabad proved that using the co-moderator format in the main sessions was very constructive and ETNO prefers - where possible - that experts with communication skills are the moderators, instead of journalists. A key note speech could replace panellists where panels seem still necessary. In addition, more emphasis and time should be devoted to remote participants.

As for the workshops, the excessive number of them held in parallel makes it difficult as regards participation and even more difficult as regards representation (balance) in the audience. We urge a reduction of workshops for the next IGF, which should -if possible- not take place in parallel to the main sessions but allow for a better use of resources. Like last year, an early call would help in this regard, and the IGF Secretariat and the MAG should continue to push for workshops that are similar to merge. As a matter of fact, it could be a good idea to set in the call for proposals an upper limit for the number/total duration of workshops which can take place, as well as to identify possible subjects (as is the case in the main sessions), which can later be specified by the potential organisers.

As for practical issues/logistics, the same rules as agreed for Sharm and Hyderabad should apply (e.g. no events during lunch, no events starting after 6 pm except for social ones). We kindly ask the Lithuanian organisers to consider providing information in a timely manner for visas, travelling and accommodation. We find it quite convenient if participants can stay at the venue hotel or at walking distance from the conference venue. We will also appreciate special hotel rates at affordable prices. Finally, besides free and reliable access to the Internet, which is an absolute must, the ability to work at the conference before or after the sessions/workshops should be considered and facilitated.