

ICANN BOARD INFO PAPER NO. 2020.06.11.1a

TITLE: ICANN69 In-Person Cancellation
PROPOSED ACTION: For Board Consideration and Approval

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

With the ongoing global pandemic of COVID-19, there remain far too many areas of uncertainty to proceed with ICANN69 as an in-person meeting. The challenges include uncertainties around the ability and willingness of international participants to travel, whether a meeting of our size will be allowed, whether the physical distancing requirements that could be required by the host country are possible to implement, impact if a case was diagnosed among participants, and the potential for a “second wave” of the virus. As a result, ICANN org, after discussion with SO/AC leaders, recommends that the Board cancel ICANN69 as an in-person meeting and direct ICANN org to proceed to convene ICANN69 as ICANN’s virtual Annual General Meeting.

ICANN ORG RECOMMENDATION:

ICANN org, after discussion with SO/AC leaders, recommends that the Board cancel ICANN69 as an in-person meeting and direct ICANN org to proceed to convene ICANN69 as ICANN’s virtual Annual General Meeting.

BACKGROUND:

ICANN org, through the Adaptive Crisis Management Team on COVID-19, prepared background materials that are attached to this paper as Annex A and B.

PROPOSED RESOLUTION:

Whereas, on 23 June 2018, the ICANN Board approved for ICANN organization to proceed to contracting in support of ICANN69 in Hamburg, Germany (<https://www.icann.org/resources/board-material/resolutions-2018-06-23-en#1.f>). Under the Meetings Strategy, and in accordance with the Bylaws, ICANN69 is scheduled as ICANN’s Annual General Meeting for 2020.

Whereas, the ICANN Board is responsible for a decision to change an ICANN public meeting location once such a meeting location has been approved for contracting and announced.

Whereas, in December 2019, a new strain of coronavirus, referred to as COVID-19, emerged and on 11 March 2020 was declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a pandemic. Globally, a high number of people either have been or continue to be under some form of a “stay at home” or lock-down order, directed to avoid contact with others except to receive essential services such as medical care or to purchase supplies. Schools and offices are starting to reopen in limited measures, gatherings are still greatly limited and international travel remains largely on pause. We still do not know when international travel will be more fully restored, or if size limitations on gatherings will be appropriately sized and feasible for ICANN’s in-person public meetings. When faced with new emergences of COVID-19, even economies that have opened back up are likely to re-impose some form of “stay-at-home” orders to once again control the spread.

Whereas, as an organization with staff and stakeholders across the globe, in January 2020 ICANN org convened an adaptive crisis management team (A-CMT) in order to assist ICANN org in tracking and mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on ICANN’s work.

Whereas, ICANN org, through the A-CMT, briefed the Board on the current status of COVID-19 on ICANN’s work, including the potential impacts on ICANN69. ICANN org has also consulted with the leadership teams of the various ICANN community structures – our Advisory Committees, Supporting Organizations, Stakeholder Groups and Constituencies - regarding the planning for ICANN69 in the face of the pandemic.

Whereas, the Board recognizes that the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact other planned opportunities for the ICANN community to further their work in-person, with ICANN67 and ICANN68 both convened as virtual meetings, with all intersessional in-person meetings for groups (including the Nominating Committee, the Security and Stability Advisory Committee and Review Teams, to name a few) canceled, postponed or moved to virtual. As much as possible, ICANN org has been in communication with the ICANN community on these schedule changes.

Whereas, at this time, it does not appear possible or feasible to convene an in-person ICANN69 in Hamburg, Germany as planned.

Whereas, ICANN org successfully moved ICANN67 to a virtual meeting, providing a useful test for the ICANN community on how to plan, schedule and execute an ICANN Public Meeting in a fully virtual setting. ICANN org, working with the ICANN Community, has been planning for the ICANN68 Policy Forum as a virtual meeting, which will see innovation in delivery of real-time translation during a virtual event, and is the first test of an ICANN Public Meeting both planned for and delivered virtually..

Whereas, ICANN org reports to the Board that it continues both its internal operational planning as well as consultation with the community on how to best design an Annual General Meeting that achieves the intended purpose and that supports the community's ongoing policy advice and development work.

Whereas, the Board understands the import of the face-to-face interactions as provided for at ICANN's Public Meetings and looks forward to a return to those interactions as soon as feasible.

Resolved (2020.06.18.xx), the Board confirms that ICANN69 shall not proceed as an in-person meeting, and directs the ICANN President and CEO, or his designees, to take all steps necessary to cancel the facilities and arrangements made for an in-person meeting in Hamburg, Germany.

Resolved (2020.06.18.xx), the Board directs the ICANN President and CEO, or his designees, to coordinate with the ICANN community on the best way forward for ICANN69 to meet the expected outcomes of an ICANN Annual General Meeting, including the furthering of ICANN policy development and advice work, reporting on milestones and community-agreed priorities for the meeting. The ICANN President and CEO is also directed to continue internal operational planning in order to support the delivery of the ICANN69 Annual General Meeting as appropriate to deliver on those expected outcomes.

Resolved (xx), the Board thanks ICANN org and the ICANN community for their attention to this important issue. The Board also thanks the hosts and venues planned for ICANN69 in Hamburg, Germany for their understanding of the need to cancel the

in-person plans for ICANN69. We hope that there is a future time that we will be able to come back and visit your city to host an ICANN Public Meeting.

PROPOSED RATIONALE FOR RESOLUTION:

The Board takes this action today in as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, considered a pandemic by the World Health Organization. While the Board recognizes and upholds the value of face-to-face interactions at ICANN's Public Meetings, and the advancement of ICANN community work that happens at these meetings, we cannot move forward with an in-person meeting at the cost of the health of attendees, ICANN org staff members, and the host country.

At the time of the Board decision, the December 2019 COVID-19 outbreak has reached to almost all parts of the world, while work on therapeutics and vaccines proceeding. Each day, there is updated news on the spread of the virus and the worldwide response. Globally, a high number of people either have been or continue to be under some form of a “stay at home” or lock-down order, directed to avoid contact with others except to receive essential services such as medical care or to purchase supplies. Across ICANN org, all offices remain are closed (except for essential items) and personnel are working from home. Those with school-aged children are expected to care for and, in many cases, take on the education of their children. Many within the ICANN community are experiencing these same impacts. Many may also be dealing with infection amongst their family and friends. The pandemic continues to impact us all.

After the Board’s February 2020 decision canceling the in-person component of ICANN67 and directing ICANN org to proceed with a virtual meeting, a virtual ICANN67 was convened. Many valuable lessons were learned from that experience, and ICANN org then proceeded to consult with ICANN’s Community Leaders about how to use the lessons from ICANN67 to design future virtual meetings as the pandemic might necessitate, taking into consideration the purpose of each Public Meeting. ICANN68, scheduled for 22-25 June 2020, will be the first test of an ICANN Public Meeting fully planned and executed in a virtual format.

Prior to taking this decision, the Board received briefings from ICANN org, on areas including the impact of COVID-19, conversations with the ICANN community, and operational planning for a distributed meeting.

We thank the ICANN community for its commitment to concluding a successful ICANN67 and ICANN68 in virtual formats. The ICANN community has shown great leadership already in a global move towards virtual collaboration.

The ICANN Board thanks the host committee as well as our community in the European Region who worked tirelessly to host this meeting in Hamburg. We appreciate their understanding and look forward to returning to the European region as soon as we are able.

This action is within ICANN's mission and the public interest, as it is the only path to assure that the work of the ICANN community continues as planned. It is the proper decision on many levels, from not putting ICANN org staff at risk nor risking the need to divert the resources and attention of ICANN org to a response to a COVID-19 outbreak amongst ICANN org or the community; to taking a responsible and proper measure to protect against contributing to the global pandemic. Given the potential inequities in participants' access to international travel and visas across regions, this decision also ensures the broadest participation of attendees by virtual means without the potential distraction of uncertainties posed by hosting an in-person meeting at this time.

This decision has resource implications that are being quantified. However, the resources needed to support an ICANN69 Annual General Meeting as can be appropriately designed are expected to be within or below the resources that have already been allocated for ICANN69 within ICANN's budget. This decision has no impact on the security, stability, or resiliency of the Internet's DNS.

This is an organizational administrative decision that does not require public comment.

Signature Block:

Submitted by: Göran Marby

Position: ICANN President and
CEO

A-CMT Board Brief – ICANN69 Hamburg 28 May 2020

This brief outlines the current status of the pandemic, both globally and in Germany, its current impact on global travel, and the major unknowns and challenges which impact Meeting planning efforts. This paper serves as a complement to [the Annex](#), which is also included in this set of Board briefing materials.

Latest COVID-19 Developments

- Now that Europe is transitioning from containment to recovery, Latin America has emerged as the new epicenter of the pandemic, alongside the US. In terms of daily rate of new cases, four of the top six countries worldwide are in the Americas.
- Despite Europe's transition, governments throughout the region have and will continue to maintain a conservative approach in their gradual emergence from national lockdowns and resumption of economic activity, public life, and regional travel.
- All governments have made clear that restrictions are likely to be reimposed if significant resurgence in cases occur. At the moment, the global scientific consensus is that until an effective vaccine is widely administered, subsequent waves of outbreak should be expected.

Status of Global Travel and Logistical Restrictions

- International travel remains severely restricted by most governments throughout the world. Generally, if incoming travel is allowed, it must be for "essential" purposes and is subject to specific requirements and limitations.
- Nearly all airlines have significantly reduced their flight offerings and workforces due to plummeting demand. Most airlines are experiencing severe financial hardship as a result.
 - Governments have invested over \$85 billion to backstop major airlines and keep them solvent. Avianca and LATAM Airlines, Latin America's two largest airlines, filed for bankruptcy this month.

Germany – COVID-19 Status

- Germany has been one of the most relatively successful countries in containing and mitigating their epidemic. Despite reporting over 180,000 cases (as of 28 May), Germany has maintained a relatively low fatality rate and one of the most robust testing and tracing systems in the world.
- Germany did not impose restrictions as severely or as broadly as most European countries. Due to its federal system of government, regional state authorities were empowered to determine and implement their own measures, though these generally aligned with federal guidance.
- Since early-mid May, German states have relaxed most restrictions on public life, though large gatherings are still prohibited. Social distancing requirements remain in effect at least through the end of June.
- In line with European Commission guidance, and the current planning of several European countries, Germany's border restrictions remain in place until 15 June. After this date, visitors from Schengen area countries will be allowed entry, but non-Schengen visitors are not allowed except for "essential" purposes only.

Major Unknowns / Challenges / Considerations

- Due to the still-unknown trajectory of the pandemic, especially regarding the potential for "second waves," **we do not currently know and cannot predict:**

- The severity of future government restrictions on inbound travel, which will likely be stricter for those coming from countries still working to contain the virus.
- The requirements that may be imposed on incoming travelers (e.g. mandatory quarantines, proof of negative diagnostic test or positive antibody test, etc.)
- The requirements that may be imposed on gatherings, either by local governments or venues (e.g. group size limits, room occupancy limits, physical distancing minimums, usage of personal protective equipment, etc.)
- Due to the ongoing damage suffered by the airline industry, which may cause significant impact to future service offerings, **we do not currently know and cannot predict:**
 - The future availability of flights to given destinations, and whether these routes will include stops through areas of higher risk
 - The restrictions or conditions imposed on air travelers, and the extent to which these may be burdensome or prohibitive
- The northern hemisphere will begin its annual flu season in October. We don't know the impact this will have on the pandemic nor the broader public health landscape, but we should expect greater-than-usual pressure on healthcare systems as a result.
- Until an effective vaccine is available, and/or it is established that antibodies confer immunity, **all international travel must be considered high-risk.**
- Privileged and Confidential

Recommendation from the A-CMT

Given the array of uncertainties outlined above, and the subsequent challenges they present for assessment and planning efforts, **the A-CMT recommends that ICANN69 be changed from a physical Meeting to a virtual Meeting.** Nick's Annex provides further details on potential options for a virtual Meeting.

Annex to Board Briefing: ICANN69 - Hamburg, Germany

Considerations for Face-to-Face Meeting in Hamburg:

- **Convention Center Construction:** The concern raised about completion of the convention center is no longer valid. Construction was never halted and we have assurances from representatives of the government of Hamburg and Congress Center Hamburg that it will be completed soon.
- **Financial Commitments:** We have not yet signed convention center or hotel contracts in Hamburg, so cancellation penalties are not an issue.
- **Decision Timeline:**
 - Early July: Identification of funded travels for timely processing of visas and flights
 - August 17: Ship Internet equipment from Los Angeles to Hamburg
 - August 31: ISP order deadline
- **Personal Distancing:**
 - Meeting seating in the convention center, now set at 1.5 – 2.0 meters, will make our typical meeting room set-ups at historical attendance levels impractical.
 - Restrictive meal seating and the banning of buffets in the convention center, and restrictive seating in area restaurants, will adversely affect delegates.
- **Flight Availability:** Germany is likely to restrict flights arriving from countries with ongoing COVID-19 outbreaks.
 - It is too soon to determine which countries will be affected.
 - With Africa currently lagging the rest of the world in outbreaks, testing and containment, those delegates are likely to be most adversely affected.
- **Hotel Guest Rooms:** We do not anticipate any issues with hotels. Hotels are establishing a rigorous regimen of disinfection, luggage delivery procedures and controlled access to guest rooms, but that will not negatively affect delegates.
- **Visas:** Many German Embassies and Consulates around the world, especially in countries with high infection rates, may remain closed making acquiring a visa difficult or impossible.
- **Community Participation:** Given the inherent health risks associated with air travel and participation in mass gatherings, we are unsure of the community's appetite to travel/meet in October.
- **COVID-19 Outbreak at Meeting:** While Hamburg has the medical facilities to handle COVID-19 cases, it is currently unclear what action the government would take in the way of contact tracing and isolation should one or more of our delegates be found to have the disease. We are awaiting further advice on the protocol they will follow from the government of Hamburg.

- **Equipment Shipment:** If we ship the Internet equipment and then decide to cancel the face-to-face meeting in Hamburg, we would not have the necessary equipment in Los Angeles should we determine that having a full-service virtual meeting there would be in compliance with local regulations and ICANN's policy for employee health and safety.

Considerations for Alternate Full-Service Virtual Meeting in Los Angeles:

- **Venue:** Should we determine that having a full-service virtual meeting in Los Angeles would be in compliance with local regulations and ICANN's policy for employee health and safety, we would conduct the meeting in the ICANN office or area hotel.
- **Flight Availability:** Assuming that travel restrictions within the US will be lifted, techs and US-based interpreters would travel to Los Angeles. Those interpreters living elsewhere who are able to travel to the US would also participate.
 - Most techs are on the West Coast making driving an option if US flights are restricted.
 - Remote interpreters using the new interpretation platform will be used to fill any voids.
- **Personal Distancing:** The venue would be set up to ensure appropriate distancing for staff.

Considerations for Alternate Remote Full-Service Virtual Meeting:

- Should we determine that having a full-service virtual meeting in Los Angeles would not be in compliance with local regulations and ICANN's policy for employee health and safety, we would conduct the meeting with all staff in remote/home locations.
- The new interpretation platform will be used to provide simultaneous interpretation in the six UN languages and Portuguese.

Recommendation:

Given the known and potential challenges a face-to-face meeting in Germany would present to the org and the community, we recommend moving directly to a full-service virtual meeting in Los Angeles or remotely.