

From: Silvia Vivanco
Date: Friday, February 6, 2026
To: Board Ops Team
Cc: Hadia Elminiawi, Hervé Hounzandji, Abdeldjalil Bachar Bong, Pierre Dandjinou, Bob Ochieng, Yaovi Atohoun, Sally Costerton, Russ Weinstein, Heidi Ullrich
Subject: Joint ICANN 84 AFRALO-AFRICANN Statement “Bridging the Digital Divide & Internet Fragmentation Risks”

Dear Board support staff and colleagues,

On behalf of AFRALO’s chair Hadia El Miniawi, kindly find attached the joint ICANN 84 AFRALO-AFRICANN Statement entitled “**Bridging the Digital Divide & Internet Fragmentation Risks**” which was discussed at the ICANN 84 Dublin meeting. AFRALO recently approved the statement for submission to the ICANN Board for information purposes.

The statement addresses bridging Africa’s digital divide and preventing internet fragmentation as inseparable priorities. It points out those uncoordinated policies and emerging technologies, including alternative naming systems, risk undermining the openness, security, and interoperability of the global internet, with disproportionate harm to Africa. It encourages ICANN to deepen collaboration with African regional bodies, including AFRINIC, the African Union, and national regulators to ensure that Africa’s unique challenges and opportunities are integrated into global governance and technical processes. The document calls for stronger collaboration, capacity building, affordable connectivity, and adherence to open standards to ensure a single, inclusive, and trusted internet.

The statement also includes a set of recommendations, a call for action, and a suggestion to initiate an action plan towards the creation of an AFRALO-AfrICANN Think Tank.

The first meeting of the Think Tank will take place during ICANN85 with the title: **AFRALO-AfrICANN Think Tank: Community Engagement, Research, and Dialogue.**

Thank you!

Kind regards,
Silvia

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Joint AFRALO-AfrICANN Meeting
ICANN 84 Dublin Annual General Meeting

25-30 October 2025,
Dublin, Republic of Ireland

--Statement--

TOPIC: "Bridging the Digital Divide & Internet Fragmentation Risks"

Preamble

Background and Context

Africa's digital transformation is advancing, yet persistent challenges related to limited infrastructure, affordability, spectrum allocation, and low levels of digital literacy continue to widen the digital divide, preventing millions from fully participating in the global digital economy.

At the same time, the global Internet is increasingly threatened by fragmentation. The rise of "splinternets," driven by divergent technical standards, data localization policies, and geopolitical pressures, endangers the Internet's openness, resilience, and interoperability. The growing discussion around Internet fragmentation includes concerns about alternative technical systems or uncoordinated policy approaches creating parallel or competing namespaces, breaking the principle of a single globally interoperable Internet.

Such fragmentation would have a disproportionate impact on Africa, where trust, regional collaboration, innovation, and access to global platforms are essential to achieving inclusive growth.

Shared Concerns on Fragmentation

AFRALO recognizes the growing debate on Internet fragmentation. Diverse regulatory frameworks, data localization mandates, technical barriers, and geopolitical tensions risk eroding the open, interoperable, secure, and global Internet. For Africa, where digital transformation is still nascent, fragmentation would magnify inequality, increase costs, and hinder trust and cross-border innovation.

Fragmentation also risks undermining Africa's progress on continental initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the African Union's Digital Transformation Strategy, both of which depend on cross-border interoperability and a trusted, unified Internet.

We recognize that closing the digital divide and protecting the Internet from fragmentation are interconnected priorities. Without inclusivity, Africa risks being left behind. Without interoperability, Africa risks being isolated.

Alternative roots that use blockchain are also a rising concern, if left uncoordinated, could undermine the trust of the Internet, putting at risk African users' ability to continue benefiting from a secure and unified Internet. If blockchain based domain names were registered in the DNS without coordination a domain name could resolve to entirely two different destinations depending on the system a user is using, leading to a clear form of DNS fragmentation. Noting as well that many users do not know how their domain names are resolved, accordingly, this could lead to major security risks and open the door for various forms of fraud and DNS abuse including phishing.

Recognition of ICANN and Community Efforts

We acknowledge ICANN's efforts to strengthen global Internet resilience, expand outreach, and build capacity, including its regional engagement programs in Africa. These initiatives have supported the growth of Internet Exchange Points, DNS security practices, and stakeholder participation. We also recognize ongoing work by ICANN to safeguard a single and interoperable Internet.

Nevertheless, persistent gaps remain in connectivity, affordability, and local technical expertise. To ensure Africa is not left behind, ICANN and the global community must work closely with African stakeholders to address both the digital divide and fragmentation risks in a holistic manner. In this regard we also encourage ICANN to consider emerging technologies and their impact on the DNS name space, which if left uncoordinated could compromise trust in the global Internet.

We further encourage ICANN to deepen collaboration with African regional bodies, including AFRINIC, the African Union, and national regulators, to ensure that Africa's unique challenges and opportunities are integrated into global governance and technical policy processes.

Recommendations

To advance Africa's digital inclusion and safeguard the open Internet, we recommend the following actions:

1. Expand Affordable Connectivity

- Start a new program to stimulate DNS Business in the region, Stimulate DNS business in the region by promoting local participation, building capacity, raising awareness, strengthening DNS security, encouraging innovation, improving policies, and fostering regional collaboration in line with ICANN's mandate.
- Finance and support the improvement of IXPs, which reduces costs by keeping traffic local.
- Deploy L-Root server (operated by ICANN) instances (IMRS) at least one per country, based on technical need, to improve latency, resilience, and DNS security.

2. Promote Digital Inclusion and Capacity Building

- Fellowship & NextGen: Increase the number of African fellows in ICANN's global meetings, giving more young professionals exposure to Internet governance.
- Community trainers: Support "train-the-trainer" programs so local experts can cascade knowledge in their own countries.

3. Safeguard Internet Interoperability

- Raise awareness among African policymakers about the technical risks of policies that could lead to Internet fragmentation and promote dialogue to safeguard interoperability.
- Promote awareness and participation in IETF, IANA, and ICANN processes among African stakeholders to strengthen adherence to open Internet standards and best practices.
- Encourage African firms and institutions to adopt globally recognized technical standards and actively participate in IETF and ICANN processes.
- Advocate for and facilitate the technical development and widespread adoption of Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs) for indigenous African languages.
- Engage in discussions about emerging technologies and blockchain domain names to explore mechanisms for coordination to preserve the global trusted Internet.

4. Strengthen Cybersecurity and Trust

- Enhance regional frameworks for cybersecurity, data protection, and digital privacy.
- Build local technical capacity to address cyber threats and increase trust in online services.
- Recognizing emerging technologies and coordinating how they operate is essential for a continued trusted and secure Internet. Areas of concern include the emergence of alternative naming systems, specially blockchain based domain names, whose registrations are increasing rapidly and are currently supported by some browsers but do not belong to the DNS name space and are not subject to ICANN's processes. This could lead to user confusion and other security risks.

AFRALO's Call to Action

- Preserve a Unified Internet:** We urge all stakeholders to uphold the principles of openness, interoperability, and inclusivity in Internet governance.
- Invest in Infrastructure and Skills:** African countries need sustainable investment in last-mile connectivity, affordable bandwidth, community networks, and digital literacy programs, with special focus on marginalized groups.
- Strengthen Multistakeholder Collaboration:** Governments, the private sector, civil society, and technical communities must work together to align policies and standards that keep the Internet unified and resilient.

- D. **Foster Local Content and Innovation:** Promoting local content, multilingualism, and regional interconnection points (IXPs) can lower costs, increase resilience, and strengthen Africa's digital ecosystem.
- E. **Evidence-based Policy:** Decisions affecting the Internet's architecture or data flows should be transparent, consultative, and grounded in technical evidence to avoid unintended fragmentation.
- F. **Human Rights as Digital Rights:** Internet access should be seen as a fundamental human right. Viewing connectivity through this lens redefines the digital divide as a social justice issue, not just a technical one.
- G. **Champion a resilient and decentralized internet:** Focus on decentralized infrastructure and open standards to prevent any single entity from controlling information flow by supporting more Internet Exchange Points (IXPs) and advocating against monopolies in digital infrastructure.
- H. **Discuss emerging technologies and their impact on the DNS name space:** to develop practical solutions that allow the Internet and the names spaces to grow safely.

Conclusion

AFRALO reaffirms its commitment to the ICANN At-Large community's role in championing the public interest and amplifying the voices of end users, especially from underserved regions. Bridging the digital divide while safeguarding the Internet's global and interoperable nature is essential to ensure that all Africans can fully benefit from the digital economy.

Africa stands at a decisive moment in its digital journey. Bridging the digital divide while protecting the Internet's openness are twin priorities that will determine whether the continent thrives in the digital economy. By empowering stakeholders, strengthening collaboration, and aligning global support with Africa's realities, we can ensure an Internet that remains one, open, secure, and for all.

It is critical that Africa not only participates in but actively shapes the norms, standards, and policies that govern the global Internet. Africa's voice must be central to ensuring that the Internet evolves in a way that is inclusive, equitable, and reflective of our shared values.

We call upon ICANN, regional organizations, and all stakeholders to join Africa in this commitment to inclusivity and resilience. Together, we can build a digital future that serves every community across the continent and beyond.

We could also create a group to initiate an action plan towards the creation of a Thinktank within AFRALO-AFRICANN. This Thinktank would reach out to external expertise, to make a baseline, suggest solutions and approaches to mitigate the digital divide through proven mechanisms in Africa. It will also serve as a platform to discuss emerging technologies and their impact on the DNS ecosystem and the broader Internet landscape in Africa.

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