

WSIS+20 Review Process - Information for the Broader ICANN Community

Government and Intergovernmental Organization Engagement
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This document provides background information and outlines the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers' (ICANN) Government and Intergovernmental Organization Engagement (GE) team's plan for covering the United Nations (U.N.) World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Review Process (2023-2025).

Introduction

In 2025, the U.N. General Assembly will conduct a review of the outcomes of the WSIS, called WSIS+20, to assess progress and identify challenges and areas for continued focus. The review in 2015, WSIS+10, resulted in an [Outcome Document](#), which reconfirmed the WSIS [Tunis Agenda](#).

Background

The WSIS was a two-phase summit hosted by the U.N. that was “initiated in order to create an evolving multi-stakeholder platform aimed at addressing the issues raised by information and communication technologies (ICTs) through a structured and inclusive approach at the national, regional and international levels”¹.

The first phase took place in Geneva in 2003, followed by the second phase in Tunis in 2005. WSIS resulted in a seminal framework for the future of Internet governance - the Tunis Commitment and the Tunis Agenda - in which governments committed to the multistakeholder model (MSM) of Internet governance and the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) was established.

The Tunis Agenda provided a framework to recognize the roles of the different stakeholders in the MSM of Internet governance, such as the technical community, Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs), business, civil society, governments, and others. The success of WSIS is attributed to the creation of the Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG), the members of which were appointed by the U.N. Secretary-General. The WGIG worked between the two phases of the WSIS and published its [report](#)² just before³ the WSIS in Tunis. Of note, the WGIG provided a working definition of Internet governance: “*Internet governance is the development and application of shared principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures, and programs that shape the evolution and use of the Internet by governments, the private sector, and civil society in their respective roles.*” Additionally, the WGIG report and the Tunis Agenda made clear that the scope of Internet governance extends beyond ICANN's responsibility for Internet names and addresses.

The WSIS+10 Outcome Document sparked a heated debate in 2015. Some U.N. member states insisted that there was a need to update the Tunis Agenda with regard to Internet governance, arguing that it should be more multilateral and less multistakeholder. The related proposals failed to gain support, and having reached no consensus, the WSIS+10 Outcome Document reaffirmed that

¹ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=30022&nr=102&menu=3170>

² The WGIG provided a definition of Internet Governance, but also - and more importantly from ICANN's point of view, it also explained that Internet Governance includes much more than just domain names and addresses.

³ The issuing of the WGIG report is widely considered as one of the crucial contributions for the success of the WSIS and the agreement on the WSIS Tunis Agenda.

“Internet governance should continue to follow the provisions set forth in the outcomes of the summits held in Geneva and Tunis”.⁴

However, in recent years, new statements in support of a change to the current MSM of Internet governance have been made by U.N. member states (some of these statements are reflected in the [GE papers](#) on the U.N., ITU, and Russia). Therefore, some member states might use the WSIS+20 review process as a venue to once more push toward changes in the existing MSM of Internet governance to increase the weight of the governments and/or attempt to replace it partly or entirely with a multilateral model. Any of these scenarios may have implications not only for ICANN’s mission, but for the global Internet.

ICANN’s Objectives

The MSM of Internet governance⁵ is the foundation for an open, secure, and interoperable Internet. The Internet, as a network of networks, is governed through a distributed system and its success is the result of collaboration among the organizations that are critical to its operations. Preserving and improving the MSM, as enshrined in the Tunis Agenda and reconfirmed in the WSIS+10 Outcome Document, ensures that relevant stakeholders will continue to work together, and that the Internet will continue to grow as an invaluable resource available to everyone. This is vital in sustaining and fortifying the overall trust of Internet users around the world in the operation of the Internet. Further upgrading this model, while keeping the interoperable Internet functioning, is a key element of achieving the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Undoubtedly, the MSM of Internet governance must continue to be agile and responsive to changes in the rapidly evolving digital landscape, where more than half of the world’s population is online. Over the years, the MSM has proven its adaptability time and time again because the policy makers - governments, business community, civil society, technical community, and others - are all at the table, involved in the discussions and the drafting of its standards and related policies that enable the development of the Internet. Thus, the MSM ensures that as the Internet grows, it remains single, interoperable, safe, stable, and resilient. It is a model that has allowed the Internet to flourish over decades, and this broad and inclusive approach also serves the global public interest.

⁴ It also states, that “the value and principles of multi-stakeholder cooperation and engagement that have characterized the World Summit on the Information Society process since its inception, recognizing that effective participation, partnership and cooperation of Governments, the private sector, civil society, international organizations, the technical and academic communities and all other relevant stakeholders, within their respective roles and responsibilities, especially with balanced representation from developing countries, has been and continues to be vital in developing the information society

⁵ It is important to keep in mind that there is a difference between the MSM of IG and the MSM of governance of ICANN. The former is defined and discussed at the WSIS, while the latter is being discussed within ICANN and its constituencies.

What Should be Done to Preserve the MSM?

By All Stakeholders

To ensure that the MSM of Internet governance endures, stakeholders should continue to:

- Support a constructive discussion, and actively and publicly communicate the successes of the MSM.
- Pay close attention to the relevant deliberations at the U.N. and the ITU, and when possible, encourage governments and organizations to raise their voices in support of the MSM. Proactively, where appropriate, engage in providing technical, neutral information about the way the Internet works to their respective permanent missions to the U.N. (in New York and Geneva). This could be done through the relevant departments in their respective ministries of foreign affairs.

By ICANN

ICANN coordinates the Internet's unique identifier systems, which enable people all over the world to connect from any device that's connected to the Internet. It is ICANN's responsibility to help the Internet community preserve a stable, open, globally interoperable, and resilient Internet, more precisely its identifier systems. To do that, ICANN will continue to share its technical expertise with all relevant stakeholders to assess the potential impact of their initiatives on the functioning of the Internet and to better understand and define the situations they seek to address.

ICANN will therefore continue to:

- Provide briefings for governments and diplomats, both in capitals and at the U.N. (in New York and Geneva). These have proven to be a useful vehicle for raising awareness about how the Internet works, what ICANN does, etc.
- Directly engage with ministries of foreign affairs, telecommunications administrations—primarily through the Governmental Advisory Committee (GAC), e-governance structures, cybersecurity officials in key countries (regardless of their positions vis-à-vis the open Internet and MSM), and others.
- Provide briefings for the ICANN community during the public ICANN meetings on geopolitical developments in this space.
- Publish papers on developments at the U.N., ITU, other relevant IGOs, as well as country focus reports.⁶
- Reach out to specialized media.
- Engage, not only with ICANN community members, but also with the Internet-related technical organizations, academic institutions, businesses, civil society organizations (outside of the ones that are ICANN constituencies) in order to discuss developments of the WSIS+20 negotiations.

⁶ Published here: <https://www.icann.org/en/government-engagement/publications>

Conclusion

The MSM of Internet governance protects the interests of all relevant organizations, governments, civil society, businesses, and Internet users – an important feature when considering the management of a resource as vital as the global Internet. While we can't speak about other parts of the Internet, we are certain that any efforts to oversee the technical underpinning of the Internet must remain within the MSM.

The WSIS+20 Review is not an isolated process within the U.N. It will take place after a number of concurrent processes have concluded, each several parallel processes, each of which could have an impact on or contribute to the WSIS+20. These include, but are not limited to, the [Global Digital Compact](#), the [Internet Governance Forum](#) (and newly established by the UN Secretary-General, the [Leadership Panel](#)), the outcome from the Open-Ended Working Group ([OEWG](#)) and the Ad-Hoc Committee ([AHC](#)).



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