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## ICANN Submission to the Global Digital Compact

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) is pleased to submit views to the Global Digital Compact. ICANN's views will relate to the following areas: (1) Connect all people to the Internet, including all schools; and (2) Avoid Internet fragmentation.

ICANN is a nonprofit public benefit corporation with a global community dedicated to keeping the Internet secure, stable, and interoperable. 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.

### **(1). Connect all people to the Internet, including all schools**

The Internet's transformative power is well established around the world. It provides significant socioeconomic benefits and serves as the foundation for the digital economy. The Internet is inextricably linked to the achievement of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) – some of which may not be realized without the potential of technologies such as the Internet. According to the International Telecommunication Union's (ITU) 2022 Information and Communications Technology (ICT) estimates, 5.3 billion people (roughly 66% of the world's population) are now online.<sup>1</sup> That is a remarkable achievement which may have seemed implausible just five years ago when only half of the world was connected. However, the COVID-19 pandemic galvanized governments and stakeholders (including the technical community, network operators, Internet service providers, businesses, civil society, and others) into action to expand Internet connectivity, demonstrating the importance of multistakeholder collaboration. **The Internet's success is partly due to its unique technical design, the standards and protocols that enable communication between devices, as well as the collaboration among diverse stakeholders, which is essential for a distributed system comprised of thousands of networks.** The multistakeholder model has proven to be effective in expanding the Internet. It remains the most viable approach for fostering collaboration among relevant stakeholders to expand the Internet. Connecting those that are still offline is an objective that remains within reach with some considerations.

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<sup>1</sup> International Telecommunications Union, Measuring digital development: Facts and Figures 2022, 2022, <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/facts/default.aspx#:~:text=Latest%20figures%20show%20that%20an,over%20own%20a%20mobile%20phone>

According to the ITU's ICT statistics for 2022, developing and least developed countries are the least connected. Expanding Internet connectivity is a critical step toward closing the digital divide.

Digital inclusion is also an important factor to consider. Most of the world does not use Latin scripts or speak English as a first language. There are approximately 7,000 languages spoken worldwide, at least half of them written. Consequently, many people are unable to benefit fully from the Internet because it is not available in their preferred language or script. Access to the Internet will only increase through digital inclusion. **People should be able to use the Internet in their native languages and scripts as it grows to include more Internet users.** The aforementioned would give people speaking diverse languages a more meaningful online experience. It would enable them to participate in the digital economy and have access to a vast array of applications and services, such as e-government services, healthcare, financial services, e-learning and educational materials, and so on.

**ICANN and its global community are committed to expanding the Internet with the continuous development and promotion of Internationalized Domain Name (IDN) Top Level Domains (TLDs) to ensure a truly multilingual Internet.** ICANN's global community has been working on IDNs for many years to increase the accessibility of the Internet and the Domain Name System (DNS) for the diverse populations of the world. However, despite the availability of IDNs, barriers remain to their use, which are complex in nature.

It is particularly important to guarantee that all domain names—including TLDs, IDNs, and email addresses—are treated equally and can be used by all valid Internet-enabled applications, devices, and systems, regardless of script, language, or character length. This is done by facilitating the awareness and adoption of Universal Acceptance (UA). UA is a technical requirement that ensures all valid domain names and email addresses regardless of language, script, or length are accepted and can be used by all Internet users. UA is a fundamental requirement for a truly multilingual and digitally inclusive Internet. This will require organizations and businesses to upgrade their systems and services to ensure they will work in the continuously expanding and evolving domain name space. The Universal Acceptance Steering Group (UASG), a volunteer-led group supported by ICANN, is working to address these issues, in addition to promoting and raising awareness of IDNs and UA. The first Universal Acceptance Day organized by the UASG took place on 28 March 2023 to rally local, regional, and global communities and organizations around the world to raise awareness of UA and encourage its adoption by all stakeholders.

In 2022, ICANN joined the ITU Partner2Connect Digital Coalition, a multistakeholder alliance aimed at promoting meaningful connectivity and digital transformation. ICANN pledged to provide capacity-development support to ten African country code top-level domain (ccTLD) registries to prepare them for competition in the domain industry. ICANN's Coalition for Digital Africa, launched in 2022, is a multistakeholder initiative (consisting of governments, regional and international organizations, and the local Internet community) that aims to support Africa's digital transformation. The Coalition supports investments in Internet infrastructure, facilitates participation in the multistakeholder policymaking process, and provides capacity-development workshops.

### Core Principles:

- Connecting all people means making the global Internet truly multilingual. A multilingual Internet ensures that no one is left behind in realizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs. **Promote and encourage people to use the Internet in their local languages and scripts.**<sup>2</sup>
- The World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) Tunis Agenda recognized that all stakeholders – not just governments – have a role to play in digital transformation. The spirit of multistakeholder collaboration enshrined by the Tunis Agenda has contributed to the Internet's growth. **The multistakeholder model of Internet governance, which is fundamental for the Internet's continued growth and evolution, should be preserved and supported.**

### (2) Avoid Internet Fragmentation

The Internet enables communication between devices all over the world, regardless of location or type of Internet Protocol (IP)-enabled device. Its core attributes of openness, interoperability, and resilience ensure that the Internet is available to everyone. Essentially, its distributed architecture allows anyone who wants to connect to the global Internet to do so. Furthermore, the more networks are connected, the more resilient the Internet becomes.

ICANN and other organizations play an important role in the technical operations of the Internet, ensuring that communications reach their intended destination while remaining secure. The Common Agenda report highlights the impact of COVID-19 on the Internet,

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<sup>2</sup> UASG, UA Readiness Evaluation of Standards and Best Practices, March 2022, Also, see <https://uasg.tech/download/uasg-040-ua-readiness-evaluation-of-standards-and-best-practices/>

stating that "total global Internet usage increased 40% during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns." During this period, the Internet proved to be resilient, demonstrating its ability to withstand a surge in demand and scale to add millions of new users who were previously offline. For example, to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the DNS, ICANN conducted tests and analyzed traffic data to measure and test the resilience built into the DNS. These measurements and studies demonstrated that the DNS handled the increase in traffic and proved its resiliency by responding flawlessly to the new challenges. **Today, the Internet's technical operations are sound and able to meet the challenge of connecting the remaining 33% of the world's population who are currently offline.** ICANN and its multistakeholder community-driven policy development process ensures that the DNS continues to be secure and resilient. The security, stability, and resiliency of the Internet contributes toward the achievement of the SDGs.

While the technical underpinning of the Internet works well, some policy actions to address how the Internet is used (applications and services) may have unintended consequences that could lead to Internet fragmentation. Recognizing the distinction between these two aspects (the Internet's functioning versus the use of the Internet) can aid in a better understanding of the issues at hand, while also ensuring that relevant stakeholders can participate and contribute in the shaping of more effective national policies that enable, rather than harm, the Internet. Multistakeholder platforms such as the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) have proven to be an appropriate venue for all stakeholders—governments, private sector, civil society, the technical community—to gather and discuss issues related to the Internet. **A commitment by all stakeholders to foster and support multistakeholder collaboration on important policy aspects is a crucial step toward avoiding Internet fragmentation and ensuring that the global Internet is available for future generations.**

### Core Principles

- The global Internet is a critical enabler for achieving the SDGs. **Preserve the Internet's core attributes of openness, interoperability, and resiliency to ensure it remains available to everyone.** Avoid unintended consequences that could affect the security, stability, and resiliency of the Internet's identifier systems.
- Multistakeholder policy development processes, such as those at ICANN and other organizations that manage the Internet's operations, result in policies that ensure the Internet is secure and accessible to everyone. Sound policies that support the Internet's continued development are a result of open and transparent multistakeholder processes.