

ITU Intervention at Virtual Spam Conference – 19.11.04

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I will do my best to highlight the key ITU activities in the area of countering spam. First, I would like to emphasize how much we appreciate the numerous interventions emphasizing the need for cooperation among intergovernmental institutions as well as the need to work more closely with industry.

As an opening remark, I would like to stress that one of the important benefits of discussions like we are having here today is to raise our collective understanding of the scope and depth of the spam issue and possible avenues of approach. I think any solution to the global spam problem cannot skip this collective learning approach and forms an integral part of any solution.

In that regard, I would like to re-emphasize a point made several times by many developing economies at the ITU spam meeting last July. They emphasized that they wanted to be involved in the formulation of solutions and not just handed a “we know what is best for you” packaged solution. An important component of the resolution of any complex ICT policy issue, of which spam is perhaps the most pressing one, is to provide genuine and real opportunities for the less economically powerful to be engaged in the discussions, to participate in decision-making processes, to understand the consequences of these decisions, and to start to socialize the issue within their national contexts so that they can adapt their policies, regulations and practices accordingly. This is going to require significant international cooperation.

To that point, a statement made by the US at the recent OECD meeting was that at the political ministerial level, even in many developed economies, there needs to be a much better understanding of the growing scope of the spam problem and, as emphasized in both the ITU spam meeting report and the OECD Busan meeting report, spam is increasingly part of a broader cybersecurity problem which may fundamentally threaten the future of internet communications. In particular, many of the technical weaknesses which make spam possible may also negatively affect the growth of VOIP.

Taking a perhaps pessimistic but justified view, I think we are in sort of a race to prop up the Internet's architecture and security infrastructure against a growing number of virus writers, spammers and criminals who are now coming together. At last Monday's European Commission open workshop on spam, Steve Linford of Spamhaus told us that approximately 100,000 new computers are being turned into zombies each week. Control of these "zombie armies" or "botnets" is now being sold on an underground black market in spam tools, virus kits and credit card numbers. I hate to say it but from all signs, we are losing the cybersecurity race and we are in a progressive Internet meltdown.

In the framework of its "Countering Spam" activities, ITU has created a database to gather anti-spam laws worldwide, and to provide a list of the competent enforcement authorities and their contact details. This regularly updated information is available at www.itu.int/spam/. As most of you are also aware, we are planning a break-out session on spam at the next Global Symposium for Regulators, which will be held in Geneva in December 2004.

I might also raise the point that if there is a realization, as pointed out often in the OECD's report from the Busan workshop, that the problem of spam can no longer be really separated from viruses and other cyberattacks, whether the solution is not really just one part of a set of solutions needed to deal with broader international cybersecurity issues.

In this regard, I would like to mention that the ITU just held a workshop on Cybersecurity in conjunction with the World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly and that from that intergovernmental conference, we now also have a specific resolution directing the ITU to not only intensify technical work in this regard but also "to continue to take appropriate action to publicize the need to defend information and communication networks against the threat of cyberattack, and to cooperate with other relevant entities in these efforts;"

Besides this event and new resolution, the ITU is planning a WSIS Thematic Meeting on Cybersecurity in June 2005. This 4-5 day event will examine the recommendations in the WSIS Plan of Action that relate to promoting global confidence and security in

the use of ICTs. Topics to be considered include exploring specific cooperative measures among governments, the private sector and other stakeholders in preventing, detecting and responding to misuse of ICTs; the sharing of good practices and guidelines in the field of information and network security; and measures to promote user education and awareness of risks. The conference will specifically consider five key areas in possible international cooperative measures including standardization, information sharing, halting attacks in progress, legal coordination, and providing assistance to developing economies. A specific part of this meeting (perhaps 1 or 2 days) will focus on spam and follow-up to the Thematic Meeting on Countering Spam we held in July 2004. We are at the very early stages of planning for this meeting and would welcome your thoughts on how best to prepare and maximize the impact of this event.

As some of you may also know, the ITU WTSA meeting in Brazil also found consensus on two new resolutions relating to spam. The first relates to exploring relevant technical standardization activities in cooperation with bodies like the IETF. The second relates to urgently preparing a report to the ITU Council who meet next in July 2005 on relevant ITU and other international activities and to propose possible follow-up actions for consideration of ITU Council. The actual resolution text is very flexible in this regard but of course, it would only make sense for us to make proposals to the ITU Council which would find broad acceptance.

In this regard, I would like to echo the interventions that any possible global frameworks or instruments of specific multilateral cooperation need to be built on a careful foundation of cooperative consensus building.