CANADA

COMMENTS ON THE REPORT OF THE WGIG

CANADIAN SUBMISSION ON INTERNET GOVERNANCE

Introduction

Canada is pleased to submit the following paper outlining its position on the report of the United Nations Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG), in preparation for discussions at the third meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).

Canada has been a strong supporter of the WSIS from its inception. Canada's original vision statement for this UN initiative was that the "WSIS is about development". Our support has been based on our belief in the importance of information and communications technologies as a tool for creating the information society. Central to this belief is our understanding that all the peoples of the world must truly have the opportunity to participate in the information society, if we are to achieve the maximum benefits for mankind. For that reason, we continue to believe that the WSIS must strive to raise awareness of the potential of information and communication technologies for development at the highest political levels. Canada reaffirms its support for UNGA Resolution 56/183 on the WSIS which recognizes "… the urgent need to harness the potential of knowledge and technology ... and to find effective … ways to put this potential at the service of development for all". Canada's contribution to the discussion of Internet governance in the WSIS context is conditioned by this development perspective.

The Internet is a central element of the emerging global information society. Thus, its security, stability, reliability and sustainability as a global network are of paramount importance for Canada in all discussions of Internet governance. To make governance effective however, we must also put capacity building at the centre of our efforts, so that all countries and all stakeholders are able to play their respective roles in an effective and responsible manner. These principles underlie the Canadian position on Internet governance.

Canada agrees with the WGIG that consideration of Internet governance in the WSIS context will benefit by separating the discussion of the broad policy issues categorized by the WGIG from discussion of the management of critical Internet resources. This paper considers each in its turn.

Addressing Policy Issues Broader than the Internet

Turning first to broad policy issues, including those related to the use of the Internet, issues whose impact is broader than the Internet, and issues related to development and capacity building:

- In principle, Canada supports the idea of creating a multi-stakeholder forum to discuss a broad range of public policy issues related to the

Internet. We believe it is desirable to build upon the dialogue established by the WGIG and its public consultations.

- We agree with the WGIG Report that the forum for dialogue should not be a continuation of the WGIG itself. As well, the forum should not be a permanent institution. It should be established for not more than five years, and its operation should make maximum use of ICTs to operate in a cost-effective and inclusive fashion.

- The forum should focus on capacity building, particularly to develop the knowledge and experience necessary for developing countries to be able to participate effectively in the discussion of Internet issues. The forum could encourage examination of a range of public policy options which may be useful for interested countries.

- The forum should not be involved in day-to-day operations of the Internet, nor distract from discussions taking place in existing organizations.

- Adequate resources must be identified to ensure that all stakeholders (including developing countries, SMEs and civil society) are able to participate. The forum should be supported by a very light organization, with a focus on development.

- Canada does not support the creation of a new treaty organization for the purposes of Internet governance.

- Canada notes that many of the broad policy issues raised in the WGIG discussions have been, or are being addressed, by existing government-funded international and multilateral organizations, including those of the UN system. These organizations bring to bear considerable experience and research capacity for international policy development, and have established public processes and consultation mechanisms capable of canvassing a broad spectrum of facts and opinion. We believe that each can make informed contributions to the discussion of broad policy issues related to the Internet, and to the need for capacity building identified in the Report. Given the significant global public investment already made in these agencies, this international resource should be fully engaged by member states in the continuing public discussion of policy issues related to the Internet, whether or not a forum is established, if only to conserve resources. Their engagement should also serve to avoid duplication of efforts.

Addressing Issues Related to Core Internet Technical Resources

Second, concerning issues of critical Internet resources: in this paper, primarily those dealt with by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN):

- Canada wishes to underscore the technical nature of ICANN as a body responsible for the administration of Internet names and IP addresses.

- While recognizing that these technical issues give rise, from time to time, to policy considerations, Canada is of the view that the short history of ICANN has seen a tendency by many stakeholders to seek to have ICANN address policy issues which are not dependent on its core technical responsibilities. This has led to confusion about ICANN's role and sometimes distracted the organization from its core mandate. By helping to disaggregate broader policy issues from those specifically arising from ICANN's primary technical functions, the WGIG has made an important contribution to delineating those matters for which ICANN should be held responsible and those which should be addressed elsewhere. Canada is of the view that, going forward, ICANN and its stakeholders should be scrupulous in taking a very narrow view of ICANN's policy functions, ensuring that any policy issues dealt with arise directly from and/or are inextricably linked to its core technical functions. Any other policy issues should be referred to other more appropriate bodies, or to the forum suggested by the WGIG, should it be created.

- Canada has been a long-time and strong supporter of the ICANN model, as a private, not-for-profit, bottom-up entity. This support is fully consistent with the views expressed above. Indeed, it is because of the primarily technical nature of ICANN's mandate that Canada has long supported this approach.

- Canada supports the continuing evolution and reform of ICANN in the post-2006 environment.

- Canada acknowledges the vital role that the United States government has played in the development of the Internet itself and, through the establishment of ICANN, in initiating a process aimed at increasing competition, privatization, and enabling international participation in the management of the Internet's technical functions. We also applaud the arm's length, light-touch approach which the United States government has adopted in its oversight of ICANN itself. Like the vast majority of participants in the WGIG, Canada agrees that the path of increasing competition, privatization and internationalization should be pursued.

- Canada supports the continued participation of governments in ICANN through the Governmental Advisory Committee (GAC). Outside the WSIS context, it may be worth exploring the establishment of mechanisms to help focus the GAC's agenda, and governments' relationship with ICANN, in a manner consistent with the narrow policy role foreseen for ICANN itself, and supportive of the goals of increasing competition, privatization and internationalization.

- The GAC's effectiveness could be enhanced by the establishment of a permanent GAC Secretariat which would focus on providing necessary logistical support to the GAC, and contribute to capacity development aimed at improving GAC participation by developing countries. A secure funding mechanism would have to be found, perhaps via an untied contribution from ICANN itself. Canada does not believe there is a need for such a secretariat to provide policy research capability. Instead, the GAC should draw on the expertise of its membership, including that of other international organizations.

Conclusion

Finally, Canada would like to congratulate and thank the Chairman and members of the WGIG, as well as the Executive Director and members of the Secretariat, for their work and the Working Group report. The WGIG process has provided an example of how a diverse multi-stakeholder group can work together to dramatically elevate the level of discussion of an important issue, and to produce a valuable outcome.