

25<sup>th</sup> CSTD Annual Session

Thursday, 31 March 2002

High-level panel on progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international level

**Statement by Mr. Olaf M. Kolkman, Principal, Internet Society**

(replacing Ms. Constance Bommelaer de Leusse, Vice President, Internet Society)

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, my name is Olaf Kolkman, I work for the Internet Society as Principal, Internet Technology, Policy, and Advocacy. It's an honor and a pleasure to participate, via -yes! - the Internet, to this important discussion today. We, the Internet Society, (and I personally) have a special interest in how the Internet, the global infrastructure that connects us all, serves the people in the Information Society.

I do not have to remind anybody that 2021 was a special year - a global pandemic is a, hopefully, once in a lifetime event. It had an enormous impact on the lives of people. Some lost their loved ones, others have long term health consequences, and many suffered from the lack of human contact. However, this pandemic raged in a time where knowledge and computational and communication power helped us to sequence the virus within weeks after its discovery. Where vaccines were engineered within months and where information around development and spread of the virus was readily available for whoever was interested in the facts. The availability of the Internet, and the world wide web was an important ingredient in that. Remember that Tim Berners Lee the inventor of the world wide web worked at CERN and one of the motivations for the invention was to share preprints of high energy physics papers fast - the web has been designed for knowledge sharing of this kind.

Additionally, the Internet quickly adapted to the usage pattern of people working from home. Business and institutions were able to continue to function because of that. The covid crisis demonstrated some of the positive aspects of a people-centered, inclusive and development-oriented information society. But it also showed that people who are not connected to the Internet did not benefit. For them it was much more difficult to stay in contact with their loved ones or maintain an income.

The WSIS annual review is an opportunity for us to highlight the importance of the Internet. The opportunity we have today to assess progress made in reaching our goals to support the growth of a strong Internet, is also a chance to reaffirm the value of collaboration and multistakeholder governance.

At the Internet Society we have worked hard to help build out the Internet to those that are most difficult to connect. With projects that support community networks we demonstrate how stakeholders such as (often local) governments, technologists, and users can come together and get connected where incumbent businesses leave those users behind. With the build-out and promotion of Internet exchange points we have made the Internet more resilient and allowed for cost reduction. With various programs at the Internet Foundation we have empowered local communities to grow their foothold in the Information society.

Back to the Internet's response to Covid: The reason for the quick adaptation of the Internet to the new circumstances lays in the fact that it is not centrally managed, that all stakeholders have an interest in making Intern-networking work. It also lays in the fact that the Internet, as a result of its building-block like architecture, allows those that build networks and those that provide applications like video messaging, work independently towards common goals: offer people what they need in their life and their work. All this was enabled by networking in a special and specific way which we call "The Internet Way of Networking".

That way of networking is possible because the Internet itself has a foundation of critical properties. Critical properties that, if they deteriorate will result in not being able to inter-network. We have documented those critical properties, together with a set of enablers that allow the Internet to thrive in an Internet assessment toolkit. Similarly to environmental impact assessments, that toolkit will help to assess if proposals by governments, businesses or others will have a positive or negative impact on an open, globally connected, secure and trustworthy Internet.

We take the Internet for granted. We need to think about the consequences of policy making on the Internet's fabric itself in order to make sure it can continue to exist and thrive. We have to make sure that its technical management is not going to be politicized. That will be a continuing challenge. For example, during the past few weeks, given events in Europe, some have been calling for specific countries to be cut off the Internet; to digitally isolate them. This would be completely contrary to the founding principles of the Internet as we've just described them. The technical governance of the Internet should not be politicized if we want it to remain a catalyst for progress, especially as we think of the WSIS targets. We have to make sure the Internet stays a global resource, and will not be split into regional blocks.

You might wonder, why this focus on the Internet - we are here to talk about the Information Society. My answer is simple: our vision of an Information Society is a global one, and an open global Internet will be the glue that keeps it together.

Thank you.

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