
ICANN71 | Virtual Policy Forum - Discussion of Future GAC Meetings
Tuesday, June 15, 2021 - 11:15 to 12:00 CEST

MANAL ISMAIL, GAC CHAIR: Thank you, Gulden, this was super-fast so thanks everyone for your patience. We are now starting a discussion on future GAC meetings. If we go to the following slide, please so as discussions continue about returning back to face-to-face meetings the goal today is to inspire brainstorm and collect feedback from delegates to ensure that GAC meetings will continue to be fit for purpose for governmental involvement in ICANN work.

If we go to the following slide on the agenda for the meeting and I'm glad to note that I will be accompanied by Nigel Hickson GAC U.K. representative in the discussion. So first we will provide a quick overview, and then considerations regarding transition or hybrid meeting approach. We will then start brainstorming on what's needed to move back to in-person meetings including going through a hybrid phase where meetings could be held partially in person and partially on-line. And then considerations for future steady state for GAC meetings, and this is the phase we will hopefully reach after the pandemic is over and we got to our steady state.

Note: The following is the output resulting from transcribing an audio file into a word/text document. Although the transcription is largely accurate, in some cases may be incomplete or inaccurate due to inaudible passages and grammatical corrections. It is posted as an aid to the original audio file, but should not be treated as an authoritative record.

So if we go to the following slide, just to allow a quick overview, since ICANN 67 the GAC maintained full virtual meeting agendas and have regularly discussed meeting challenges and have tried to improve gathering feedback from GAC members. ICANN... have improved and I think we all have witnessed this first hand, and a good example of this is the refined interpretation now integrated into the Zoom platform. I remember the -- at ICANN67 we were doubting whether the interpretation will work in the virtual meetings, the committee has maintained regular cadence of GAC work efforts to throughout the pandemic and thanks to each or every one of you for your dedication and participation. And recent community discussions have turned to a possible 2 step return to face-to-face meetings, as I was mentioning one step would be the initial hybrid effort and then full face-to-face meetings with some changes based on community pandemic experiences, of course.

ICANN conducted a survey of post meeting attendees, which was just completed and I believe we will be briefed on the results of this survey during this session, and it will be an opportunity to here some preliminary survey results, as I said, and this hopefully would pave the way to a discussion upcoming on Thursday that this is a community session on the overall ICANN public meeting topic. So with our GAC requirements and experience in mind it would be good to participate in this global community-wide

discussion. Moving to the following slide, and thank you, Nigel, for sharing the link to the survey in the chat, and allow me to hand over to you for this part thank you.

NIGIL HICKSON:

Yes thank, you very much, Manal. And good morning, good afternoon to everyone. And I've posted a, posted the survey link, and a blog by Sally Costerton in the chat which I think outlines some of the responses and thanks to GAC members and others who contributed to this survey.

I think what we'd like to do is have a discussion and we haven't got much time, so -- and I think it will be good to get some contributions from as many people or GAC members as possible on this call, on what the right thing might be the best way forward in this -- in this regard. The clearly, as Manal has said we are in a -- in this the transition phase, and within your own communities, within your own experiences, no doubt you will be discussing in your governments, you know what the new normal is going to be. And at least is something that certainly we've been doing in the U.K. government of the what will the new normal be?

For many of us of an age and there's few of us on the GAC, of a certain age I suppose, that you know we were simple servants in the 80's and 90's. The we -- the concept of not going into an office

was quite bizarre. If you weren't in the office you weren't working. And if you were invited to a meeting, if you didn't physically attend the meeting then you had missed the meeting. You had missed the bus, so to speak.

Now, of course it's very different, and the pandemic has shown us perhaps something we might have appreciated any way in the fullness of time how a virtual environment can work. How a hybrid environment can work but it's also shown some of limitations of the virtual environment. So these considerations that are being made in many areas including your own environment, are those that are here in the discussion. As Manal said, we're going to have this wider discussion on Thursday in terms of the community and the community's wish on these things.

Within the GAC, of course, we have some particular issues, in a hybrid environment in terms of how we effectively conduct meetings. How we can assess a quorum, and other issues and how we can formulate advice and promote promulgate advice if you like GAC advice in the best possible area, and I'll finish here but just one point.

I think we -- everybody is very conscious in this new environment, in terms of participation, it gives people the ability to participate,

that perhaps wouldn't be able to participate in the physical meeting because of costs, because of travel restrictions, because are their work environment, because of perhaps their own well being they can't travel for whatever reason, and so it enables people to perhaps take part and contribute who couldn't do so before and this is really fantastic, and encouraging.

But at the same time it does make it sometimes more difficult to ensure that everybody has the ability to contribute in a positive way that, people have the tools, that people have the ability, that people had the background information to be able to take part in these sessions. And this is where I think we want your reactions here, you nominee for some of new members is it -- would you -- do you find it easier to be able to you know raise a glass of beer, or share a coffee with someone like myself that's for experienced, not that I'm more experienced in the GAC at all. But you know with Jorge or Manal do you find it easier to understand more about the GAC by physically meeting someone? Or are you able to you know pick up the ropes, so to speak, in this virtual environment?

So I think, Manal, I'm in your hand but I think it would be good to have a discussion. I'm not sure -- I've forgotten what the next slide is.

MANAL ISMAIL, GAC CHAIR: Yes, if I may, if I may†--

NIGIL HICKSON: Of course.

MANAL ISMAIL, GAC CHAIR: Nigel just before opening the floor for discussion we have Nick Tomasso on-line with us to provide us with the survey result so thank you very much Nick for joining us, and the floor is yours, thanks.

NICK TOMASSO: Manal, thank you very much for the invitation to participate in your meeting.

I'm Nick Tomasso heading up the global operation team. I would give you a brief overview of this and then listen intently as you discuss your needs moving forward. We launched this community survey about three weeks ago. It was conducted to investigate the possibility of organizing ICANN72 in Seattle as a hybrid meeting with virtual and in person attendance we targeted current virtual attendance and previous for the past 3 years. A formal Board decision and whether ICANN72 will be held in person will be considered by the ICANN Board in July this year.

And, of course, this survey will be an important part of their deliberations.

We do realize that borders remain closed in some parts of the world. We can't definitively anticipate what the situation will be in October but as we do, dive into the survey we find that a majority of the community is interested in returning to in-person meetings. With, with the appropriate safety precautions, however there's some caveat, around 50% did not agree or were neutral in holding in-person meetings if it meant decreased global diversity among attendance and this is one thing the GAC will consider in the deliberations moving forward. So on the detail, we had 514 community member responses to the survey from all 5 ICANN regions. The responses were representative of sample closely mirroring a typical ICANN meeting percentage of attendance from each meeting. We had a 32% response rate to the survey which is significant, and more than many of the other surveys we've run over the years.

I know all of you have access to the survey now. In fact, some of you may have seen it but I would like to go over a couple of items that jump out from the survey. One of the questions we asked was do you agree with ICANN holding an in person meeting under the following conditions. Reduced global diversity, and we had 54% saying yes that would be okay 23% saying I don't know,

and 23% saying, not -- no, we don't want that. The other question to consider is limited attendance by SOAC members, so if all of the GAC were not able to participate in person, would that still make your work effective?

And then the third question that I think is significant is limited attendance due to vaccine requirements, 64% said yes it would be acceptable if that were a condition of attendance. 18% said no -- excuse me, 18% said maybe and 20% said no.

We then took those three questions and did a deeper dive because we felt that the geographic issues that specifically geographies are facing might have, in fact, affected those numbers so we looked at reduced global diversity of IT of attendance due to COVID restrictions and as I mentioned we had a 54% said we could run a meeting, we looked at Africa with 55% positive, Asia Pacific with 49% saying yes, Europe with 51% saying yes, Latin America with 49% saying yes, and North America with 63% saying yes, so as you can see there's no mandate if you will on that particular question. We then looked at the question of limited attendance by SOAC membership. And I'll remind that you it was 55% said that would be acceptable to run an in person meeting. We looked at Africa at 55% positive, Asia Pacific at 63%, yes, Europe at 47%, yes, Latin America at 45% yes and North

America at 58 P % yes. Then we did a deeper dive by geography and the vaccine question.

64% says it would be okay to have a vaccine requirement to attend the meeting in person, but here I think it was particularly important to do a deeper dive by region much the Africa region said 52% said, yes, we could do it under those conditions. Asia Pacific was 59. Europe 66, Latin America and the Caribbean 53% and North America at 73%.

And then the final question we then -- after that we then measure the community as willingness to participate in person with risk mitigation protocols, like face masks physical distancing, COVID-19 testing on site and pre travel and on site and vaccinations and that was -- that was overwhelmingly positive in the 72 to 76% range on all of those questions. So with that I will stop. That's a flavor of what we are looking at. I will stop with the briefing and turn it back to Manal. And let me know if there's any other information, I can provide please Manal and Nigel.

MANAL ISMAIL, GAC CHAIR: Thank you very much, Nick. So allow me first to ask if there are any questions specifically to the results Nick have briefed us on before getting into a more GAC detailed discussion so that we can

set you free Nick if you'd like to. So any questions specifically to Nick and I see Kavouss's hand up.

KAVOUSS ARASTEH:

Yes, thank you very much for the presentation. I have a serious concerns about request he or issue 8. From ICANN67 up to now under your able chairmanship, Manal, we have achieved the consensus without any difficulty, so we don't want to say that consensus measurement in physical meeting versus nonphysical meeting or virtual. This is a dangerous question. And put our consensus advice into some instability so we don't want to discuss that. You have been able to achieve consensus. So we don't want to say that how who measure. There's no need to measure that. It is a chairman who -- he or she, make every possible effort to achieve consensus with the best of the management and understanding. This is one point.

But the reason I raise that was not this. Was that even if -- or once we get into the full scale face-to-face still it would be appropriate to have complementary mutual as Nigel referred for those countries, whether developing or least developed country that would not have the possibility to attend physical meeting and they would have the possibility to as a complement to the physical meeting to attend that meeting. This is something which is not replacement. Which is not hybrid but complementary

virtual meeting, accompanied or associated with the physical meeting. Thank you.

MANAL ISMAIL, GAC CHAIR: Thank you very much, Kavouss, and regarding your first question I think this is directed to us here in the GAC, myself and Nigel I'm sure it's -- because those questions are brainstorming questions, they have nothing to do with the survey Nick was presenting on. So on the GAC consensus, and maybe consensus was not the best word to use here. I think the worry is about the quorum of the GAC. And just 4 colleagues who may not be familiar per the operating principles of the GAC. Operating principle 1/3 of the representatives of the current membership are voting rights shall constitute a quorum of any meeting and a quorum shall only be known at a meeting of which decision or decisions must be made.

The GAC may conduct the general business face-to-face or on-line and I think this last sentence gives us also some flexibility. So this is why we were talking about the quorum and how to measure the quorum and how to deal with whatever the setup we end up having. So, before continuing the discussion, maybe if we show the following slide, and then I'll hander it back to Nigel for moderation also. The slide before this? Slide 7 I'm sorry. And this is in relation to heavy ... looks like looking at -- so again, we said it's about 2 phases, one the hybrid and then the other is in relation

to steady state. So we also need to factor in the lessons learned during the pandemic. For example if the remote set up is now factored in within the quorum I mean, before, before the pandemic we normally counted the quorum from those who are physically present at the meeting

Are we going to count the quorum between the in person and those who are participating remotely? And if we are going to do so during the transition or the hybrid phase, are we going to also continue with this throughout our meetings in the future, and if this is the case, maybe we need to fine tune operating principles if there is going to be a steady state thing of course, and not temporary.

Also, virtual tools if there are any tools that need to be explored, and this is also something to consider. So I think with this we can take maybe the questions. I'm not sure whether Nigel you would like to go one by one and see if we have any immediate reactions, or†--

NIGIL HICKSON:

Yes, I mean thank you so much, Manal. I mean, I think you know the questions are very key, but I think we're also willing, or very keen to hear people's views on these questions but also on other points ahead of our session on Thursday so let's try and here from

quite a few different regions. We've got people I know GAC members from Australia and Africa on the call and Europe of course as well, and North America so perhaps we can have a bit of a conversation here, so please just put up your hand or -- so others will be able to see you, and just let us know your views and the question or other points. Who wants to be first? Don't be shy. You can't offer a free coffee.

MANAL ISMAIL, GAC CHAIR: I see Jorge's hand up but also, I see a comment in the chat from Susan from the United States. Has there been any consideration given to technology on site of the meeting that would better enable virtual participants to engage on par with in-person participants realizing that process of the meeting may have to be adapted in tandem with that technology? Good point, Susan. And a point well taken. We need to of course consider how to seamlessly merge the on-line attendance with the in person attendance.

So I see Jorge, and then Vincent, France, so back to you Nigel I'm sorry.

NIGIL HICKSON: Great. No, not at all. Go Jorge. Yes, go for it.

SWITZERLAND: Thank you. Thank you, Nigel, and thank you Manal. Jorge Cancio for the record.

Just some comments. I think we are witnessing it everywhere across the borders of different international organizations, it seems that the future will be hybrid in some shape or form, for this to happen we of course will need to take over to this new hybrid logic an equal treatment of those who are on side, and those who are on-line because if we remember the time before COVID-19, we used to have the Adobe room for everybody to connect, but basically those attending the meeting, those counting also formally for the quorum, were those on site and we have to change that logic I think. If the future is hybrid, we have to treat all those attending the meeting equally, and as Susan said we'll have to maintain or even further develop the technological means to make that happen, for instance, the obligation of using the same queue for asking for the floor so that those present fiscal physically are not advantaged over those not present, and other means like cameras. I don't know. The technological possibilities are enormous, I think. So that's a first thing.

Second one is we still will need to have some physical portion of the meetings, at least on my impression not only in the GAC but also in other places is that whenever a process has already

started, and the stakeholders know each other it's more or less easy to continue virtually. But when you need to really start something from scratch or really give a boost to a process you need those physical encounters. Those spontaneous meetings. Those more let's say private interactions where you can develop the beginning of a consensus-making process.

At the same time probably we won't need three face-to-face meetings in a year. Maybe we also have to be mindful of our carbon footprint, of the costs involved also for those with less resources, so maybe it's worth while thinking about perhaps having some of the meetings more virtually based, and others more hybrid or more face-to-face oriented.

Finally on the return although I personally would very much look forward to getting back to the face-to-face meetings, although in this hybrid setting of course. I think one very important condition is that the vast majority of colleagues should be able to do so before we really start thinking about it seriously. Thank you.

NIGIL HICKSON:

Thank you very much. And Vincent, bonjour. Please take the floor.

FRANCE:

Bonjour. Can you hear me? Well, good morning, good evening and -- to everyone. I would like to make a few comments in French.

Thank you very much, Jorge, for what you just said, I agree with everything that you mentioned, but personally, I am very much for going back as soon as possible to face-to-face meetings. At the same time I believe that we shouldn't proceed too quickly for as long as the pandemic has not been addressed everywhere, I think that we are in some kind of after no man's land or an unstable situation, and this situation there is a risk of increasing inequalities, and the abilities of countries to participate in the work of the GAC, and to undermine its legitimacy. So what we can fear or worry about if we go back too quickly to in-person meetings is in ICANN72 in Seattle that it mostly involves developed countries where the population is being vaccinated massively.

And at ICANN72 we might only have represents of the developed countries whereas in countries where the vaccination campaigns are not as quick and massive -- they will be limited to remote participation, which means that we have a problem in equality participation.

As far as hybrid I agree. The future is in hybrid and it's carries a lot of potential to improve participation at ICANN meetings in the future, but we need to innovate in order to make sure that whoever is present remotely is able to express their views as much as those who are in present. Perhaps alternating between participants. You know one virtual and one face-to-face person participating. Perhaps work on the appearance on the screen so that people are present that way. I think there are a lot of things that we can think about but in the meantime, I think we need to be prudent. Over the past few months we were able to work remotely completed and works well.

The first consensus advice shows we adapted during ICANN70 is a testimony to that. We are cruising along and the idea of going back to face-to-face meetings while the pandemic is going on, without making sure that everybody is on equal footing may not be the best idea and I think that the hybrid model needs to be considered but prudently. Thank you very much.

NIGIL HICKSON:

Thank you very much. That's all very wise thoughts there, and let's go to Karel in a slightly different area but yeah. Good morning to you, sir. How are you?

KAREL DOUGLAS: Good morning. I'm going to make it very brief, and I want to support Jorge's contribution. In particular I wanted to mention that the GAC has a very unique -- I want to apologize also for not having my camera. Not quite appropriate but be that as it may -- I was saying that the GAC has a unique situation where we find every year or every meeting a significant amount of members are new members and for me what I recognized it's very difficult to have an engagement with new members in a virtual setting. The reason is the face-to-face meetings produced a very unique opportunity to for someone unfamiliar with the GAC and the topics of the GAC. They got engaged.

Therefore the importance of face-to-face meetings for persons who would otherwise not be engaged, who have the ability to meet and discuss, not necessarily of the actual meeting itself. In between the meetings, and I always say that would be the coffee breaks or the social meetings, the social events sorry that take place. That was a huge benefit of face-to-face meetings, in particular for the GAC because the GAC has this particular issue, and that is my contribution Nigel and Manal and Jorge. Thank you and thank you everybody else. Stay safe, all of us.

NIGIL HICKSON: Thank you and good to see you. We look forward to seeing you in person. Manal, I think you had your hand up so please have on.

MANAL ISMAIL, GAC CHAIR: Yes, thank you, Nigel, and thanks everyone for the very valuable interventions.

So I think there were also good questions posed by or shared by Nick from the survey about a more holistic view whether limited attendance by one SOAC would be accepted meaning that for example if the GNSO is able to hold their meeting in person, being all from one region for example would this be okay to convene an in-person meeting while the GAC can for example -- is unable to convene in person?

And the other thing, the reduced global diversity which already Vincent referred to, what if a region or two are well vaccinated and able to attend while our regions are not. Is it okay to go hybrid? But also, I agree with everybody that the future is hybrid. And we need to take this into consideration with the very good points raised by Susan and Jorge regarding the equality of participation and maybe even the queue should be only managed on-line to make sure everybody logs in and still we can take the queue from one form be it Zoom or whatever else but just to make

sure we are interlacing fairly between remote participants and in-
tentional participants.

But again, just to flag that we have 2 sides of the discussion, one
that is very GAC related, and Rob also put something in the chat
in relation to the travel support, and I think there was another
type of support granted to remote participants, and whether this
should continue or not, whether it should be also I have no ...
ongoing during the hybrid phase I mean going for both support.
So many things to think about, but I'm just -- in addition to our
very GAC discussion also bringing to the discussion the 3 topics
that Nick mentioned. Reduced global diversity. Limited
attendance by one SOAC and limited a tendency by vaccination
requirements, and again, no one is doubting the benefits of the
face-to-face. I think the question is when to start face-to-face
meetings. And ultimately ending I would say by the hybrid
situation. It's not a transition but probably a steady state
situation but where the remote things about this is more of a
personal individual choice, and not enforced situation.

I'll stop here mindful of time. Back to you, Nigel, for any final word
before we conclude.

NIGIL HICKSON: Thank you very much, Manal. And you know very wise words. A lot to think about, and I think your observations about the steady state being hybrid is something that many people are thinking about.

Look, we are out of time. I don't think there's anyone else in the queue, but if anyone wants to shout out, please do, but I think we, we ought to proper already I close here, unless Gulden, you tell me otherwise by our time is up isn't it.

GULTEN TEPE: Yes.

NIGIL HICKSON: So -- were we supposed to be finishing at 11 o'clock.

GULTEN TEPE: Yes, we need to conclude--

NIGIL HICKSON: Right. I thought so, so let me thank everyone. I mean thanks for non-GAC members as well that have taken part in the chat and listened in. Thank you so much, Nick. I hope you're still there, and Ashwin for contributing. Thanks for a really excellent survey,

thank you so much for this contribution, and thanks all, and we'll know doubt this is a topic that will come back to later in the week. Thank you.

GULTEN TEPE: Back to Manal, to Nigel as well and just flagging the other opportunities to continue our discussion.

MANAL ISMAIL, GAC CHAIR: During the GAC wrap-up session there is also the community discussion we mentioned on Thursday, and any feedback we received from you, you will be challenging through the SOAC community discussions after ICANN71.

We now have a 30-minute break, and please be back in the Zoom room at 12:30 the Hague time. 10:30. UTC for the RDS has in data protection session, thank you.

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