The ccNSO Strategic and Operational Planning Working Group

Mr. Fadi Chehadé, President & CEO

Mr. Steve Crocker, Chairman of the Board

ICANN

12025 Waterfront Drive, Suite 300

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Dear Mr. Chehadé and Mr. Crocker, dear Fadi and Steve,

I am writing to you in my capacity as Chair of the ccNSO Strategic and Operational Planning Working Group (SOPWG) to share with you the concern and frustration of the Working Group with the current ICANN Strategic and Operational & Budgetary planning processes. On several occasions - both during meetings as well as in writing - the Working Group has expressed some overriding concerns to you both, most recently in the paper "Summary of previous comments of the ccNSO SOPWG on ICANN's Strategic Plan" of 10 May 2013. These concerns were also raised during ccNSO & ICANN Board sessions.

At the heart of these substantive concerns is what we believe is the absence of a truly responsive and structured planning process. Our frustration flows from the lack of appropriate responses from ICANN to the feedback we have provided over the years, or any regular follow-up on the planned actions and deliverables. Our concerns and frustrations necessitate that I write to both of you directly

The ccNSO has been a long-time participant in ICANN Strategy discussions and in support of that work, created the SOPWG. The goal of the SOPWG is to coordinate, facilitate, and increase the participation of ccTLD managers in ICANN's Strategic and Operational Plan and Budget by offering input to these processes. The comments are passed on directly to ICANN, as well as being shared and discussed with the community. The submissions are prepared by the members of the SOPWG[1], who are both professional managers and executive

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[1] The listing of members can be found at: http://ccnso.icann.org/workinggroups/sopiwg.htm

representatives of the ccTLD community with a keen interest and expertise in strategic and operational planning, and whose ultimate goal is the improvement of ICANN's long-term processes. The work of the SOPWG has earned the respect of the ICANN community and its comments have been repeatedly and publicly supported -and even re-stated- by other communities like the GNSO and the GAC.

Since its creation in November 2008, the Working Group has noted that year after year the planning process for both the Strategic Plan and the Operational Plan and Budget lacked the continuity and consistency that should be at the heart of any medium or long-term approach. The variability and lack of predictability in the planning process makes effective planning nearly impossible. For example, while there were many deadlines set as part of this process, they were rarely met. Despite such challenges, the Working Group has continued to provide constructive input to the process. In some cases, particular comments had to be repeated year after year as we saw little substantive improvement in areas that we consider crucial to the mandate of ICANN.

The SOPWG understands that it might be hard for ICANN to incorporate all comments submitted by the various constituencies and stakeholders. However, the community expects ICANN to live up to its own planning, plans and budgetary responsibilities. The SOPWG expects ICANN to provide a clear and substantiated rationale if certain comments about its plans and/or procedures are not followed up and/or taken on board. To illustrate this point, I draw your attention to (two of) the Working Group's most recent comments on the FY14 Draft Operational Plan & Budget:

- On the draft FY14 Ops Plan & Budget, we submitted the general comment that it lacks measurable goals (a comment that has been widely echoed by the community, not only during the ICANN Durban meeting, but also over the years). ICANN staff responded that "*metrics and deliverables are continuously being developed*". This response did not provide any insight into the metrics and deliverables in place and leaves the SOPWG (again) wondering how the budget and operating plan could have been approved if deliverables and metrics are still being developed.
- We also raised the point that ICANN had not clarified its rationale for or substantiated the need for the astonishing 23.8% increase in expenses for ICANN operations. In response, ICANN provided a two-sentence reference to a new strategic planning process: "*At the Toronto ICANN meeting we obtained consensus from the community that the strategic process should be simplified for FY13 in order to allow the CEO to redesign a future strategy and strategic planning process. The new strategic planning process will link the strategic objectives to a multiyear action plan which in turn can be related to the annual budget in a clearer manner than the past process has allowed*".

These are just two examples that create the impression that the SOPWG spends far more time and brainpower on its comments than ICANN spends on meaningful responses and/or the implementation of improvements based on those comments. The lack of adequate action or feed-back stands in contrast to the level of support for and association with our views by the larger ICANN community. If ICANN is truly interested in encouraging the SOPWG, and indeed other SO/ACs, to continue their efforts in this respect, it needs to validate our work by taking the time to respond substantively.

The SOPWG reiterates our strong commitment to channeling the ccTLD community's feedback and ideas in the ICANN strategy process. In return, we would want to see a strong commitment and concrete steps by the Board and leadership team to improve the quality of the entire Strategy and Operating Plan and Budget process and its resultant outputs. The Working Group remains available to meet you at the next ICANN meeting to discuss this matter further

Kind regards,

Roelof Meijer,
Chair of the ccNSO SOPWG