



Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

REPORT

CONFERENCE AND PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS TO ESTABLISH THE ARAB INTERNET GOVERNANCE FORUM BEIRUT, 31 JANUARY–1 FEBRUARY 2012

Summary

The Conference and Public Consultations to Establish the Arab Internet Governance Forum (IGF) was held from 31 January to 1 February 2012 at the Habtoor Grand Hotel, Beirut, Lebanon. The event was jointly convened by ESCWA, the League of Arab States and the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Lebanon, and was co-sponsored by Réseaux IP Européens Network Coordination Centre and the Kuwait Information Technology Society. It was held in cooperation with Al-Iktissad Wal-Aamal Group, the global IGF secretariat, and the Arab Working Group on Domain Names and Internet Issues.

The Conference aimed to engage and publicly consult key stakeholders on the viability and modalities for establishing an Arab IGF by exploring and articulating all the major building blocks needed to launch and maintain it until 2015. This activity sought to reach stakeholder consensus and agreement on the need for an Arab IGF, which will facilitate implementation of the Arab Regional Road Map for Internet Governance.

Conference participants drafted an outcome letter which outlined the Arab IGF process as a decentralized platform for inclusive policy consultations that includes all stakeholders, as agreed in the Geneva Declaration of Principles and the Tunis Agenda of the World Summit on the Information Society. It specified the aim, nature and mechanisms of the Arab IGF, its organizational framework, financing of activities and periodic convening of its meetings. The League of Arab States presented the outcome letter to the meeting of the Executive Bureau of the Arab Telecommunications and Information Council of Ministers (Beirut, 2 February 2012), which commended the initiative to establish the forum and called upon Arab countries to actively participate in the process.

The Conference was attended by 68 participants including experts from governmental, non-governmental and private entities from the Arab region, civil society, academic, international and regional organizations. Participants represented 14 countries: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Malta, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates.

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Introduction

1. The Conference and Public Consultations to Establish the Arab Internet Governance Forum (IGF), was held in Beirut, from 31 January to 1 February 2012, and was jointly convened by the Information and Communication Technology Division of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the League of Arab States and the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Lebanon. The Conference was co-sponsored by Réseaux IP Européens Network Coordination Centre (RIPE NCC) and the Kuwait Information Technology Society. It was held in cooperation with Al-Iktissad Wal-Aamal Group, the global IGF secretariat, and the Arab Working Group on Domain Names and Internet Issues.
2. The Conference aimed to engage and publicly consult key stakeholders on the viability and modalities for establishing a regional Arab IGF by exploring and articulating all the major building blocks needed to launch and maintain the process until 2015. This activity sought to reach stakeholder consensus and agreement on the need for an Arab IGF process, which will facilitate implementation of the Arab Regional Road Map for Internet Governance.
3. Conference participants drafted an outcome letter representing various stakeholders, and the League of Arab States presented the outcome letter to the thirty-first meeting of the Executive Bureau of the Arab Telecommunications and Information Council of Ministers (ATICM) (Beirut, 2 February 2012), which commended the initiative to establish the forum and called upon Arab countries to actively participate in its process. The letter outlined the Arab IGF process as a decentralized platform for inclusive policy consultations that includes all stakeholders, as agreed in the Geneva Declaration of Principles and the Tunis Agenda of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). It specified the aim, nature and mechanisms of the Arab IGF process, its organizational framework, financing of activities, and periodic convening of its meetings.
4. The Conference addressed the following topics: global IGF, experiences and lessons learned; mandate and the nature of an Arab IGF; proposed Arab IGF process; roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders; establishment of the Arab IGF secretariat, formation of the multi-stakeholder advisory group; discussion themes for the Arab IGF and the schedule of work, with the global IGF and “Arab Regional Road Map for Internet Governance: Framework, Principles and Objectives” as a reference; scope and activities for hosting annual meetings; and input to the seventh global IGF in 2012.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS

5. Participants drafted an outcome document in the form of a letter addressed to the meeting of the Executive Bureau of ATICM. The letter outlined the Arab IGF process as a decentralized platform for inclusive policy consultations that includes all stakeholders, as agreed in the Geneva Declaration of Principles and the Tunis Agenda of WSIS. It specified the aim, nature and mechanisms of the Arab IGF process, its organizational framework, financing of activities, and periodic convening of its meetings.
6. The outcome letter was drafted in Arabic, and included the following content:

“Within ongoing coordination between the League of Arab States and ESCWA on the Arab Regional Road Map for Internet Governance, a consultative conference was held towards establishing the Arab IGF, from 31 January to 1 February 2012, in Beirut, Lebanon.

The Permanent Committee for Telecommunications and Information, in its thirtieth meeting (Abu Dhabi, 8-9 January 2012), called upon Arab authorities to participate in the Conference, and asked the Arab Regional Office of the International Telecommunication Union, the Arab Information and Communication Technologies Organization, and the Arab Regulators Network to forward the Conference invitation to private sector and non-governmental organizations and to take action to motivate them to participate.

The Conference was attended by more than 60 participants representing Arab authorities, regional organizations, civil society and other stakeholders.

Pursuant to the decision of the fifteenth session of the ATICM (Beirut, 2 June 2011) on the initiative, the Conference reviewed the Arab Regional Road Map for Internet Governance and its general framework, principles and objectives, and addressed the need to hold an annual IGF in the Arab region.

The Conference also discussed mechanisms to convene the forum and obtain funding, and the possibility of hosting the forums and mandating that the secretariat work through the Information and Communication Technologies departments in the Governments of Arab countries.

The Conference also discussed regional forums held by other alliances and interest groups in Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America, along with national forums that were launched recently in some countries, and the consultations that are currently underway on the establishment of forums for Internet governance that may include some Arab countries.

Based on the Conference discussions, participants agreed on the importance of establishing an Arab IGF to meet annually and provide a decentralized platform for dialogue that involves all stakeholders, as agreed upon in the Geneva Declaration of Principles and the Tunis Agenda of WSIS.

Participants agreed upon the following:

Forum objectives

(a) Discuss public policy issues related to Internet governance, particularly the issues raised in the global IGF in order to foster the accessibility, security, stability and development of the Internet;

(b) Facilitate the exchange of information, best practice, lessons learned and knowledge, particularly between policymakers, technical experts and academics and to publish recommendations and proposals;

(c) Harmonize different points of view into a common understanding of the region's priorities for Internet governance and the mechanisms to respond to the needs of Arab countries;

(d) Discuss emerging technologies independent of the operational management of the Internet, and develop relevant recommendations, as needed;

(e) Contribute to capacity-building in the area of Internet governance in Arab countries, and encourage all stakeholders to participate and benefit from resources of knowledge and experience;

(f) Transfer the Arab perspective to the global level and support the Arab role in the formulation of public policies for Internet governance without taking a supervisory role or replacing existing mechanisms, institutions or organizations;

(g) Communicate with regional and international IGFs to facilitate the exchange of experiences and knowledge transfer.

Nature and mechanisms of the forum

- Includes all stakeholders, as defined in the outcomes of WSIS;
- Consultative forum, publishes discussions and non-binding proposals and recommendations;
- Maintains a decentralized and flexible structure;
- Relies on multiple sources of funding.

Organizational structure for managing the forum

- A multi-stakeholder advisory group will comprise representatives of Arab Governments and regional organizations, the private sector and civil society and other stakeholders. The group takes decisions related to the work of the Arab IGF, identifies topics for the agenda, and looks after the organization of its meetings and related proposals. It benefits from the experience of group members, and ensures an optimal Arab IGF output with a positive effect for all stakeholders;
- The secretariat of Arab IGF, hosted by the National Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Egypt, coordinates with the host bodies of the periodic Arab IGF events and handles logistics and technical preparations for the work of the Forum and its components.

Sources of funding

During the conference, a number of participants expressed interest in supporting the organization and convening of an Arab IGF similar to the regional forums in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The following sources of funding were specified: the host of the forum bears all expenses related to convening its meeting; voluntary contributions from Arab Governments; contributions of international and regional organizations, non-governmental organizations and other donors; private sector contributions; in-kind contributions from Governments and other parties in the form of studies or activities at their expense for the benefit of the Forum; and other sources.

Arrangements for convening the forum

Conference participants welcomed the initiative of the Kuwait Information Technology Society to host and organize the first meeting of the Forum in October 2012. A number of bodies also expressed interest in hosting and organizing subsequent events, including telecommunication authorities and non-governmental bodies from Algeria, Bahrain, Lebanon and the Sudan, in addition to the Arab Organization for Administrative Development and the Arab Information and Communication Technology Organization.

In addition, the secretariat of the global IGF and (RIPE NCC) showed their willingness to provide technical support on remote participation.

Other matters

Participants discussed the framework of WSIS in relation to international Internet governance through the global IGF, and the path of the enhanced cooperative process that aims to enable Governments to develop international public policies regarding the Internet and keep pace with Internet developments and to achieve the vision set by the Summit.

Conclusion

Participants thanked ESCWA and the League of Arab States and the Lebanon's Presidency of the Council of Ministers and their partners for convening and organizing the Conference.

Participants called upon ATICM to present the results of the Conference to the meetings of the Executive Bureau in Beirut on 2 February 2012, in order to strengthen the role of government interaction with the work of the Forum”.

II. PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

7. The Conference included seven rounds of open consultations, including presentations and discussions of principal themes.

A. SETTING THE SCENE

8. The first session included an introductory statement, two briefing notes and a keynote speech. The session was opened by Mr. Haidar Fraihat, Director of the Information and Communication Technology Division (ICTD) of ESCWA, in which he reviewed the work of ESCWA in collaboration with regional institutions on ICT for development, and providing support on policies for sustainable development and integration into the global economy. Guided by the outcome of WSIS and its eleven Action Lines that target building the information society, the Division seeks to bridge the digital divide and reduce poverty in the region by promoting Internet governance and following up on the global IGF process. Within the context of those efforts, the Conference promotes dialogue and discussions on Internet governance issues at the regional and national levels. It was convened in response to the 2010 request of the Executive Bureau of ATICM to hold a consultative conference to discuss the need for the establishment of an Arab IGF, similar to IGFs in other regions.

9. The first briefing note of the session was delivered by the Conference Chair, Mr. Ayman El-Sherbiny, Chief of the Information and Communications Technology Policies Section of ICTD, ESCWA. He reviewed “Background, context and expected accomplishments” and briefed participants on the series of events that preceded the consultations, including coordinating time-sensitive regional efforts with the League of Arab States and soliciting extrabudgetary funds from co-sponsors and partners for pressing activities. He asked participants to consider, “who governs the Internet and how?”, and briefed them on WSIS phases and outcomes while focusing on three key areas, namely Internet governance, financing mechanisms and the follow-up to WSIS outcomes.

10. He outlined the development of the global IGF process and the formation of regional IGFs. He reviewed agreements on Internet governance and the role of Internet governing bodies and governments, private sector and civil society in the formulation of international policies. He noted some milestone activities and publications produced within the regional follow-up to WSIS and IGF, including the Arabic Domain Names System, and the Arab Road Map for Internet Governance, a background document for the Conference.

11. The second briefing note, entitled “Insights on the evolution of the global IGF process,” was delivered by Mr. Chengetai Masango, Programme Technology Manager of the IGF secretariat, Geneva. He started by highlighting the notable role of the Arab region in the inception of WSIS and its outcomes, which include the global IGF process, and crediting the focus on Internet Governance to the 2003 Beirut preparatory conference for WSIS that contributed to putting Internet governance on the Geneva agenda. The Geneva discussions on Internet governance led to formation of the Working Group on Internet Governance that issued the following definition in 2005: “Internet governance is the development and application by Governments, the private sector and civil society, in their respective roles, of shared principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures, and programmes that shape the evolution and use of the Internet.”

12. The definition called for a multi-stakeholder approach to formulate Internet principles and norms. The working group also proposed models for Internet governance, and IGF emerged from the Tunis Agenda, which recommended that all countries “Discuss public policy issues related to key elements of Internet governance in order to foster the sustainability, robustness, security, stability and development of the Internet”. Because the Internet is a global public good, its policies need to be internationally and regionally coordinated, and IGF processes were the platform for deliberations. The first mandate for IGF from 2006 to 2010 was renewed for five years until 2015, in line with the general WSIS review. Such forums are a platform for multi-stakeholder policy dialogue, employ “soft governance” and rely on stakeholders to shape and influence public opinion. Its secretariat monitors the participatory method of discussions of Internet governance issues, builds capacity, facilitates connections between stakeholders and stores institutional knowledge.

13. In addition, the IGF has a multi-stakeholder advisory group comprised of many representatives who bring new ideas and perspectives. The chair of the group serves as the special advisor to the Secretary General on Internet governance. The main duty of the group is to formulate a programme and agenda for annual IGF meetings, which may focus on such issues as access and diversity, Internet governance for development, security, openness and privacy, critical Internet resources and emerging issues. As an evolving dynamic process, themes for IGF meetings might change to include issues or problems. The process involves dynamic coalitions on different themes, and some 10 regional IGFs were formed to address overlapping themes and specific issues. National and regional IGFs are independent of the global IGF, and tend to tackle national and regional needs and seek to implement related activities. The statement also reiterated the main objectives of WSIS.

14. The keynote speech of the session, entitled “Internet Governance Priority Issues and Dynamics”, was delivered by Mr. Tarek Kamel, an expert in Internet governance and former Minister for Communication and Information Technology of Egypt. He noted that a multi-stakeholder, bottom-up approach had been used for the past 15 years in the establishment of Internet management organizations in the Arab region and Africa, which featured successful collaboration between the technical community and many organizations. With time, changes were witnessed in the landscape, platform, implications and effects of Internet growth on communities.

15. Current estimates indicate that there are more than 2 billion Internet users worldwide, 6 billion mobile phone users who may become Internet users in the next 10 years and 1.5 billion fixed phone users who are mostly broadband and Internet users. There are more than 200 million registered domains worldwide, a figure that is expected to increase by another 100 million, and there are over 3 billion Internet protocol (IP) addresses worldwide. With technological development, the capacity to store and disseminate information will increase and the provision of very affordable prices would encourage the growth of Internet.

16. During the 2011 Arab Spring, social media content and users increased significantly. The Internet is not limited to text-based content, but enables voice- and video-based communication that transcends language barriers. Internet governance is not limited to the technical community, but impacts many players from many areas that normally are not involved in policymaking. Internet governance has become a political, social, economic and developmental issue that impacts all areas of life.

17. In view of the multi-stakeholder, bottom-up approach, the IGF process involved many players in its meetings and addressed Internet opportunities and services. The main issues of Internet governance worldwide include the following: (a) Internet governance for development, including affordability and access; (b) emerging issues, including cloud computing, social networks and mobile communications; (c) safety, privacy, security and openness; (d) access and diversity, relating to infrastructure, Internet exchange points, backbone development and multilingualism; (e) management of critical Internet resources, namely the coordination and management of the technical identifiers of the Internet: domain names, IP addresses, autonomous systems, protocol parameters and protocol poles; (f) multilingualism and the new generic top level domains; and (g) the future of the freedom of speech on the Internet.

18. With only 1 per cent of Internet content in Arabic, the region's local content challenge comprises text, audio, video and the development of user-generated content. Internationalized domain names are catching on in the region, which is a step towards e-government services. Another challenge is to build the capacity of the region's growing youth population by developing multilingualism, safety and security, and structures of domain names. The Internet is not only about access, it is about transforming and changing people. Infrastructure poses another serious challenge. The region must build Internet exchange points to catch up with the global evolution in mobile technologies and the development of generic top level domains.

B. PLENARY AND PANEL DISCUSSION

19. The session featured a panel discussion moderated by Ms. Christine Arida of the National Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Egypt on the theme "Global Internet Governance Forum: Experiences and Lessons Learned". The panellists were Mr. Baher Ismat of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), Mr. Chengetai Masango of the global IGF secretariat, Mr. Haidar Fraihat of ESCWA, Mr. Mohamad Timoulali of the Economic Commission of Africa (ECA), North African Subregional Office, Mr. Paul Rendek of Réseaux IP Européens Network Coordination Centre, and Mr. Qusai Al Shatti of the Kuwait Information Technology Society.

20. The panel discussion provided a perspective on lessons learned during the six years of the global IGF process and identified the building blocks to consider during subsequent sessions of open consultations on establishing the Arab IGF. The global IGF process took an inclusive, multi-stakeholder, bottom-up approach in developing its agenda, and an Arab IGF could follow a similar process to ensure that it suits and addresses the needs of the region.

21. In the global IGF process, multi-stakeholder involvement was essential to success. The process started with a call for proposals posted on the web site. Members of the multi-stakeholder advisory group shared the call with the different groups and communities. Annual IGF meetings run within a continuous process of discussions that collects feedback on issues and feed into a synthesis paper representing the open paper for IGF consultations. Participants in IGF meetings could attend, take part in online platforms and speak in open consultations. Issues are discussed and prioritized during two days of multi-stakeholder advisory meetings, after which a programme paper is published online. It is reviewed throughout the year based on community feedback. The open consultations involve online and face-to-face meetings, within which participants reflect back on the programme paper that includes cross-cutting themes. The meetings emphasize global representation and multi-stakeholder involvement in the discussion of issues, and are followed by a review session to improve performance.

22. The impact of regional IGFs on the global agenda is illustrated by the experience of ECA in developing the African IGF, which reflected the specificities of that region. Within the African initiative for the information society, ECA promoted discussions on formulating ICT policies for development and using the Internet and Internet governance for development. Meetings were held to create different forums for West, East and South Africa, and currently for North Africa. The African IGF was promoted by ECA to encourage African participation at the global level. Collaboration between the African IGF and the foreseen Arab IGF was proposed given the geographic proximity of the regions and that some Arab countries are also part of Africa.

23. Discussions addressed the role of the technical community in the global dialogue on Internet governance, and in supporting a strong start for the Arab IGF. The technical community participated with other stakeholders in the IGF process and were able to reach a large audience and give technical advice to governments on public policy and national initiatives. As supporters of the multi-stakeholder dialogue in the IGF process, they collaborated and cooperated to address challenges and meet the region's needs, referring related issues to the global IGF. Also, a close relation with Internet service providers in the region could enable their involvement in the regional dialogue.

24. Engaging all stakeholders is key to the success of IGF dialogue and the nature of the IGF as a non-binding and non-decision making body enables dialogue on policy formulation. The Arab region has been involved in WSIS and the global IGF process from the start, however, the time is right to establish an Arab IGF to coordinate regional dialogue and represent the region's interest at the global level.

25. The bottom-up approach of ICANN in policy dialogue to enable consultations with local communities was highlighted, together with the organization's efforts to reach common understandings on issues for the region. Challenges and opportunities include the capacity of institutions to follow the participatory model for community involvement in policy making.

26. The panellists highlighted the recent focus of the global IGF process on Internet governance and development, and the ways that the Arab IGF can use the strength of the Internet at many levels of development. Panellists discussed the role of sustainable development in the Arab IGF. Panellists raised the idea of the citizen becoming a citizen of Internet, and considered dialogue and collaboration on Internet issues to be essential for development in the region.

27. The discussions emphasized public engagement in formulating Internet policies that are adapted to the region's economic needs, and participants tackled effective methods for engaging the public, youth and women in the Arab IGF initiative. Through enhanced cooperation, stakeholder dialogue and involvement can be facilitated. Stakeholders comprise governments, academia, technical communities, civil society, the private sector and multilateral organizations with open platforms.

28. The limited resources of IP per capita were addressed, indicating to the need to adopt IP version 6 within a growing Internet use and content. Participants stressed the responsibility of governments and organizers of the IP system to manage and make platforms for version 6 within a harmonized work process that ensures coordination and avoids chaos.

29. Participants noted that governments are slow to fight cybercrime, and IGFs may be able to engage civil society on this issue. Furthermore, using ICT for development proved an effective means for networking and engagement in regional and national IGF processes. The importance of participation in setting the vision and areas of focus of the Arab IGF was highlighted, whether in the agenda or discussions of policy.

C. OPEN CONSULTATIONS

30. This session included seven rounds of open consultations, addressing the following topics: the needs and nature of the Arab IGF; components of the Arab IGF process; partnerships of the process; the first Arab IGF programme; theme and milestones; and conclusions of the consultations.

31. The consultation on the needs and nature of the Arab IGF started with a background presentation on the "Arab Regional Road Map for Internet Governance", given by Ms. Hania Sabbidin Dimassi of the Applications Section, ICTD, ESCWA. The presentation covered the initiative of ESCWA and the League of Arab States entitled "Arab Dialogue on Internet Governance" that was launched in 2009 to harmonize activities at the regional level that assist Arab countries in reaching Internet governance goals. The initiative included a study on Internet governance,^{*} the Arab Regional Road Map for Internet Governance, a proposal for launching the Arab IGF, an online portal and joint public meetings. Each of these components represents continuous collaboration between ESCWA and the League of Arab States and the speaker emphasized that ATICM had adopted the Regional Road Map.

^{*} ESCWA, 2009, Internet Governance: Challenges and Opportunities for the ESCWA Member Countries (E/ESCWA/ICTD/2009/7).

32. She briefed participants on the modality for developing the Road Map using the logical framework methodology across six subprogrammes identified by ESCWA as priority areas for the Arab region and in line with themes discussed in the global IGFs: institutional empowerment; critical Internet resources; access; cultural and linguistic diversity; security; and openness. The Road Map was a key component in the 2010 “Call of Arab Stakeholders - Towards Promoting Arab Cooperation for Internet Governance regionally and internationally” that had the ultimate goal to launch a multi-stakeholder Arab IGF process.

33. The components of the proposed Arab IGF were discussed and covered the following: the process mandate; positioning of the regional Arab IGF within the global IGF process; the secretariat of the Arab IGF; and the multi-stakeholder advisory group. Internet governance has become part of daily life and there is a need to use Internet technologies to achieve effective socioeconomic development and enhance the well-being of citizens.

34. The multi-stakeholder advisory group, as a programme committee, identifies and meets needs and facilitates financing through sponsorships and connections. The members of the group collaborate with national teams and players, and mailing lists could be made to facilitate communication between the group members and communities for open and inclusive Internet governance in member countries. Teleconferencing and online meetings could enable wider participation. The region’s technical community of networking operators could have a significant role in the success of such events.

35. The National Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Egypt offered to host the Arab IGF secretariat, and the Kuwait Information Technology Society offered to host the first meeting of the forum to be held in late 2012. Participants approved both proposals, and delegates from Algeria, Bahrain, Lebanon and the Sudan expressed interest in hosting subsequent annual meetings of the forum.

36. The importance of remote participation in the forum meetings was raised, and could be facilitated by the technical partners and contacts of the global IGF secretariat. The conference of the global IGF secretariat provided for remote participation through the Internet.

37. The partnerships of the proposed Arab IGF process were the subject of one round of open consultation, which covered the following topics: budget requirements and financial and promotional plan; host country tasks and responsibilities; the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders, including initiators, partners or sponsors; and the relationships between host countries and the Arab IGF secretariat and multi-stakeholder advisory group. Participants concluded that the Arab IGF would require the following logistics components: a website for the basic secretariat services; a website for the Arab IGF; two full-time staff to work within the secretariat; a multi-stakeholder advisory group; one focal point for each country; two mailing lists for the multi-stakeholder advisory group and the public; and the ability to facilitate remote participation and teleconferencing.

38. Flexible funding models could be based on the experience of the global IGF process, where the host country bears the cost of hosting while the secretariat bears the cost of its operation. Participants discussed the criteria for nominating country focal points and selecting multi-stakeholder advisory group members, taking into consideration that members would be responsible for programme coordination, and securing partnerships and sponsorships.

39. A preliminary round of consultation covered the first Arab IGF programme, including the following topics: the preparatory process; the themes and programme format; and the high-level plan, timeline and milestones. The Arab IGF process is intended to implement the Regional Road Map for Internet Governance. A profile document of the Arab IGF was suggested as a preliminary milestones and two participating organizations, ICANN and Samena Telecommunications Council, volunteered to call for participation in the Arab IGF process.

40. A drafting committee, formed during the Conference, summarized the conclusions and recommendations of the open consultations and worked on the outcome document. The drafting committee prepared a letter as an outcome document which became an input to the meeting of the Executive Bureau of ATICM for endorsement and cooperation on the Arab IGF. This outcome letter was discussed by the participants and adopted in the last session of the Conference.

D. DISCUSSIONS

41. During the open consultations, experts deliberated on the different themes and made suggestions for consideration. The discussions of the Conference are summarized below.

42. Participants emphasized that the Arab IGF is a process rather than a one-time event, and that the region faces the challenges of capacity-building as only 1 per cent of Internet content is in Arabic, and Arabic domain names are a good opportunity for the region. Participants felt that ICT and Internet governance in the region are overlooked and too often affiliated to information. Instead, participants suggested the perspective that ICT and Internet governance are vital components of human capital and skills development and emphasized their economic impact. The Arab region could benefit more from using ICT in productive economic sectors.

43. Participants emphasized the need for Governments to reach a common position on issues at the international level, especially considering the responsibilities at the national level. Dialogue between countries in the region is needed to reach agreements and influence international decisions on issues.

44. Participants recommended that each country have an internal discussion of the issues it is facing which should be raised in the Arab IGF process. National dialogues on priority areas can create country-specific points of view which are broader than the views of individuals. National priorities and positions could then be discussed at the regional level in the proposed Arab IGF, and later at the international level. Also, participants noted the need for an inclusive and effective process that involves stakeholders.

45. Engaging stakeholders was discussed by participants, who emphasized strengthening the role of Governments, civil society, non-governmental organizations, youth and women in the Arab region in the process and ensuring a more effective decision-making channel. The multi-stakeholder approach ensures wide involvement in shaping effective policies that governments would actually adopt. Participants also discussed the possibility of a virtual Arab IGF, without country offices.

46. Participants emphasized the need for openness and transparency in the work of the Arab IGF, and electronic tools could be used to achieve a high level of coordination and make the process more inclusive. The secretariat should encourage participating organizations to share and publicize information on the Arab IGF process, and interested communities should be included in the mailing list.

47. Participants asked to clarify the specific role of the secretariat, in terms of teams and tasks for the Arab IGF meetings. Participants asked about the selection of local focal points, the selection of multi-stakeholder advisory group members, and if the global IGF model would be followed in the way the group is formed. They emphasized the need to maintain a light structure of the Arab IGF, together with the need for the multi-stakeholder advisory group to reach out to all groups within all sectors.

48. Members should be elected based on their profile and the substantive and technical skills they bring to Arab IGF programme. Guidelines could be issued to help form the multi-stakeholder advisory group, following the model of the global IGF multi-stakeholder advisory group. Furthermore, with technology advancing ahead of legislation and policies, the group ought to make open calls for proposals. Setting up online mailing lists was considered a high priority, followed by a website that enables participation in the process.

III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. VENUE AND DATE

49. The Conference was held on 31 January and 1 February 2012, in Beirut, Lebanon, at the Habtoor Hotel.

B. OPENING

50. The Conference was opened by three inaugural statements, by the convening organization, ESCWA, the partner organization, the League of Arab States, and the host country, the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Lebanon. The opening session was moderated by Ms. Salam Yamout, National Information and Communications Technology Strategy Coordinator of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Lebanon.

51. Mr. Nadim Khoury, Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCWA, gave the opening statement in which he reviewed the aim of the Conference, which was to conduct stakeholder deliberations in the Arab region on the requirements for launching an Arab IGF, and to reach consensus on the issues related to implementation and follow-up, and phases for convening annual meetings from 2012 and until 2015. The forum would be a platform for regional policy dialogue between stakeholders including governments, the private sector and civil society, to reach a common understanding of the region's priorities and position on Internet governance, and respond to regional needs. He also highlighted the role of ESCWA in global IGFs from 2006 to 2010, which included conveying the vision and needs of the Arab region within global Internet governance policy and decision-making processes, and initiating the Arab Dialogue on Internet Governance and publishing an "Arab Regional Road Map for Internet Governance" in 2010. He noted the attention ESCWA directs to social media tools, especially in view of wider social and media networking which has created new opportunities in governance and businesses since 2011. He noted the presence of ESCWA on Facebook and Twitter, which has opened channels of communication with the youth and Governments in the region, and the instant publishing of conference feeds on facebook.com/ArabIGF and twitter.com/IGFArab.

52. The statement of the League of Arab States was delivered by Mr. Khaled Foda, Manager of the Information and Communications Technology Department, who spoke about the expanding role of the Internet in work and knowledge, social connectivity and networking, commerce and economic support. He spoke about WSIS discussions of the rights of governments to govern the Internet versus the rights of citizens to interact and freely contribute to Internet information and applications rather than only consuming information and applications. He pointed to WSIS Tunis Agenda that called for convening an annual IGF as a platform for dialogue between stakeholders on Internet governance issues. Six global IGFs have convened so far, and the following subjects have been covered: managing limited Internet resources; information security; privacy and openness; increased access and diversity; and Internet governance for development. Owing to differences between regions, regional IGFs were formed and the initiative for an Arab IGF takes the region's specificities and traditions into consideration, and allows countries to exchange views and reach common positions on Internet governance.

53. On behalf of the President of the Council of Ministers, Lebanon, the host country statement was made by Mr. Samir El Daher, advisor to the Prime Minister on economic and development issues. In his speech, Mr. El Daher emphasized the importance of the dialogue on Internet governance in the region, managing Internet resources and domain names, providing access for all, ensuring cultural and linguistic diversity, and protecting children and fighting cybercrime. He noted the need to balance security and openness, and to use the Internet for education and distance learning to develop the skills of citizens, create job opportunities, and enhance the competitiveness of the region. Furthermore, he commended the timing of the Arab IGF discussions, especially considering that the youth are eager for change in the aftermath of the Arab Spring.

C. PARTICIPANTS

54. The Conference was attended by 68 participants including representatives of governmental, non-governmental and private entities from the Arab region, civil society, academic, and international and regional organizations. Participants represented 14 countries; Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Malta, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates. A list of participants is provided in annex I of this report.

D. DOCUMENTS

55. A list of documents of the Conference is provided in annex II of this report and is available from <http://www.escwa.un.org/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNum=1759E>.

Annex I*

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Algeria

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Annex II

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

(a) Background documents:

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- Information Note (English and Arabic)
 - Agenda (English and Arabic)
 - Arab Regional Road Map for Internet Governance: Framework, Principles and Objectives E/ESCWA/ICTD/2010/Technical Paper.5

(b) Outcome document:

Letter addressed to the Meeting of the Executive Bureau of Arab Telecommunications and Information Council of Ministers (ATICM) (Beirut, 2 February 2012) on the Conference and Public Consultations to Establish the Arab Internet Governance Forum (Beirut, 31 January-1 February 2012) (in Arabic)

(c) Presentations:

Arab Dialogue on Internet Governance
