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Global Internet Leaders Welcome Internationalization of Internet Address Names

Wide Praise Surrounds ICANNs Early Adoption of Internationalized Domain Names During Egypt Meeting

Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt... November 16, 2009... Egypt today announced that it is applying to use Arabic characters for the first time ever, in its entire Internet domain name.

Egypt's announcement coincides with the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) formal opening today of the application process for delegating, or entering into the master root of the global Internet, a number of "internationalized" domain names, or IDNs, where scripts such as Arabic or Chinese will be used in the last portion of an address name – the part after the dot such as dot-com and dot-org.

Representatives of Saudi Arabia and Russia also announced at the Egypt IGF meeting that their respective countries have also applied for IDNs under the "ccTLD Fast Track" process.

"The Internet now speaks Arabic," said Egypt's Minister of Communication and Information Technology. During a news conference earlier today he announced his country's IDN application, saying "This proves that ICANN is interested in the multilingual development process of the Internet and we're thankful to be one of the first to apply for an Arabic IDN."

Kamel addressed a news conference at the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) meeting in Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt. The annual conference has drawn government and private sector Internet leaders from around the globe.

“The opening of the IDN application process today will go down in history as a major step in Internationalizing the Internet,” said Rod Beckstrom, ICANN’s President and CEO. “More than half of the world’s Internet users do not use a Latin-based script for their native language, so this marks the beginning of a process that will make the Internet more accessible to millions of those online users today and potentially billions tomorrow.”

Today’s formal launch of the IDN application process follows ICANN’s announcement a few weeks ago, at its meeting in South Korea, that it had agreed to the gradual introduction of Internationalized Domain Names. Initially, IDNs will only be allowed on a limited basis involving country codes, which are the designators at the end of an address name, such as dot-eg (for Egypt) or dot-ru (for Russia). Those countries can now apply to use IDNs in their native language scripts for those “country code” top-level domains (ccTLDs). Eventually, the use of IDNs will be expanded to all types of Internet address names.

While the ICANN application process calls for treating each application as confidential, the corporation has confirmed that it has so far received 6 applications for ccTLD IDNs representing 3 different languages.

“This is the biggest technical change to the Internet’s addressing system – the Domain Name System – in many years,” said Tina Dam, ICANN’s Senior Director of Internationalized Domain Names. “Right now, it’s not possible to get a domain name entirely in for example Chinese characters or Arabic characters. This is about to change.”

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To access a video recording of today’s news conference in Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt go here:
<http://www.un.org/webcast/igf/ondemand.asp>

To read more about the implementation of the IDN measure passed by the ICANN Board go here:
<http://www.icann.org/en/topics/idn/fast-track/idn-cctld-implementation-plan-30sep09-en.pdf>

To read more about the Internationalized Domain Names program go here:
<http://www.icann.org/en/topics/idn/factsheet-idn-program-05jun09.pdf>

About ICANN:

To reach another person on the Internet you have to type an address into your computer - a name or a number. That address has to be unique so computers know where to find each other. ICANN coordinates these unique identifiers across the world. Without that coordination we wouldn’t have one global Internet. ICANN was formed in 1998. It is a not-for-profit public-benefit corporation with participants from all over the world dedicated to keeping the Internet secure, stable and interoperable. It promotes competition and develops policy on the Internet’s unique identifiers. ICANN doesn’t control content on the Internet. It cannot stop spam and it doesn’t deal with access to the Internet. But through its coordination role of the Internet’s naming system, it does have an important impact on the expansion and evolution of the Internet. For more information please visit:
www.icann.org.