

**Women at ICANN – A Call for Action on Mitigating Harassment Incidents at ICANN:**

We, as relatively newcomer women in the ICANN community, have been ecstatic to engage in discussions and input thoughts into processes of policy development each in relation to our own multi-stakeholder backgrounds. We've seen efforts in including more women in the community and it has been relatively accessible, however not as welcoming as we would have imagined it to be.

ICANN 59 was the first meeting after the anti-harassment policy has come through with a new mechanism for reporting any type of inappropriate behavior or harassment. Having seen no precedent of how the mechanism goes, us women are hesitant about using the mechanism. We are aware and acknowledge that this is a rather new policy but we'd like the organization to be more clear and transparent about the mechanisms that the ombudsperson office relies on. Keeping in mind that some of us have had bad past experiences of reporting incidents outside ICANN, when talking about harassment issues, where normally rampant repercussion and marginalization for merely being vocal would be the result.

Women like us in the community many times have been constantly faced with harassment, and accordingly we feel uncomfortable being present in the community thus we feel unwelcome practically. Several of us are considering simply being engaged virtually, as physical engagement through presence in the meeting has been faced with verbal harassment and even physical harassment. We've collected cases of harassment that have happened to us below, and we refrain from using names for now, in order to keep the focus on the topic and not the person per se.

*“He is normally very respectful but that night I was surprised. We had been having a glass of wine in a networking event and we were having a pleasant conversation until he said “you know, if you were my wife, I would stand here” he stands behind me, and says “I would do it from here”. I told him it was very inappropriate, keeping in mind that he had been drinking and he might have thought it was funny. But it's not. Not at all. And people should know by now. **If I'm being nice to you, it does not mean I'm being flirty. And if I seem to be friendly, it doesn't mean I want to sleep with you. And being intoxicated by alcohol? Is definitely not a justification.**”*

*“I was standing alone during a coffee break when he came walking my way saying that I was very beautiful and he had to come talk to me. **I smile awkwardly and start going away, when he holds my wrists saying I should stay, because I am so beautiful and there is nothing really important going on.** I continue slowly taking my wrists off his hands without making a scene, when he continues saying the same things. I look around to check if someone is looking and I am saved by the lady giving me back my change. - do not come to me to say I am beautiful, nor my lipstick or my dress are sexy. If you want to start a conversation, ask what I do, what do I work with and why am I here. Do not acknowledge physical attributes and reduce me to this. If you want to talk to women in a professional setting, do not tighten her wrists, do not grab her waist. Do not ask whether she is married or not. Regardless, **you should respect her integrity, not her marital status.**”*

*“We were both fellows and as part of the program we are encouraged to engage and create camaraderie, friendships and network. We were all having fun, taking pictures, drinking and dancing. Being single and fun does not mean you can disrespect me. The other night he would send me messages “come on, let’s have some fun! You are a fun girl, let’s go out or let me go up to your room”. In the absence of response, he starts calling my room from the reception desk. I don’t answer and **he decides it is a good idea to go up to my room, knock on my door and try to open it.** I moved a chair to block the door and called the reception. Don’t ever go to a person’s room without being invited. Don’t creep around trying to open the door or waiting for me to arrive on my room. This is creepy, wrong, frightening and intimidating.”*

*“I was body blocked from leaving a room by a man who insisted on talking to me and not letting me pass by him. His line of discussion to me was entirely inappropriate and I didn’t want to speak with him, but he would not let me pass by and leave the conversation. He did this by repeatedly stepping in front of me when I tried to get around him to pass by and leave.”*

*“You are old enough not to blame alcohol for touching me inappropriately. Grow up and learn how to be around women: **if they are friendly to you this is called ‘politeness’ and ‘networking’.** She does not want you to touch her ass.”*

These actions which are definitely categorized as harassment and even assault, would not only affect the woman who went through the incident but it would also lead to several probable repercussions such as (1) Her withdrawal from the community and physical presence. We all know how important being present in meetings is on different levels of engagement in and outside meetings (2) When no solid response from the community is done towards the harasser, there can definitely be an increase in aggressive characters of harassers as there would be no accountability to stop them (3) With the increase in harassment there surely will be a decrease in the representation of young women's voices in any proceeding which defies the core concept of diversity.

According to the above, we set forth the following recommendations:

- There should be a woman ombudsperson for harassment reporting. It has been proven by several studies that given the sensitivity of the issue, harassment reports are more prone to be tackled and come forth with, when the ombudsperson is (a) a woman (b) an expert in gender-related issues and mitigating harassment risks,
- There should be more efforts on the part of the ICANN organization to raise awareness on the anti-harassment policy to all participants. For instance:
  - Every ICANN participant should have entirely read and promised to commit to the anti-harassment policy prior to engaging in any ICANN meeting and not only ticking a box,
  - There should be more visuals around meeting centers on what harassment is for better knowledge on limits that people should draw when engaging with anyone in the community,
- We suggest amendments on the policy:
  - The policy should be more detailed on the full process of the ombudsperson's mechanism, such as details on the informal discussions that happen in the reporting mechanism when the harassment incident firstly happens,
  - The policy should take into account not only the offender's cultural background but also the victim/survivor's cultural background. There should be considerations on both sides and not solely on the harassers' side,
  - The policy should have stronger wording on repercussions. When there is clarity on the process and a concrete repercussion that can affect the presence of an offender in an ICANN community, then the policy would work.

***We are willing to make ourselves available for any further questions  
Thank you in advance for your consideration***