

AFRALO / AfrICANN joint meeting

Copenhagen, Wednesday 15 March 2017

Statement

We, African ICANN Community members participating in the ICANN 58th International Public meeting in Copenhagen and attending the joint AFRALO / AfrICANN meeting on Wednesday 15 March 2017, discussed the At-Large review report issued by the external reviewer "ITEMS" for public comment.

While we support an important number of the report's recommendations, such as the limitation of the number of terms of the At-Large Advisory Committee (ALAC) members, the definition of metrics of participation, the improvement of outreach efforts, etc., we have a major concern with other recommendations.

In the report, reviewers talk about reforming At-Large rather than reviewing it, which is largely reflected in the various recommendations. Also, no connection was established between the recommendations and the problems they are supposed to address.

The report proposes a significant change in the structure of At-Large, suggesting:

- The replacement of the current "At-Large Structures (ALS)/Regional At-Large Organization (RALO)/ALAC" structure with a new one called Empowered Membership Model (EMM) and based mainly on individual members, RALOs, and ALAC populated mainly by the RALO leaders.
 - Any individual from any region becomes an At-Large Member (ALM) as soon as he/she signs up to an ICANN Working Group (WG)
 - Voting rights are given to ALMs after several months of active WG participation
 - The 5 ALAC Members appointed by NomCom will be the Liaisons of ALAC to the other ICANN constituencies.
- The removal of all At-Large Working Groups
- The modification of the Board member (Seat 15) selection process in the following way:
 - Candidates to self-nominate
 - Nominating Committee (NomCom) vets nominees to produce a slate of qualified candidates
 - Random selection from the slate produced by the NomCom
- The replacement of the 5-yearly global At-Large Summit (ATLAS) meetings with an alternative model of annual regional At-Large Meetings
- Etc.

We believe that the proposed "reform" will cause a serious damage to At-Large concept that was introduced in ICANN to balance the political and commercial interests by a community that defends public interest only.

At-Large is supposed to represent the interests of end-users as per the ICANN Bylaws, and was designed (also by the ICANN bylaw) so that ICANN has a presence on the ground in each country of the world representing the interests of end-users. The At-Large Structures (ALS) ensure such presence.

While we fully agree that individual membership should be encouraged together with ALSes, we think that well established ALSes with legal status in their countries are the guarantee that At-Large is really reflecting the interests of end-users. Furthermore, outreach and engagement efforts are easier when handled by a recognized body as opposed to individuals. Replacing ALSes with ALMs will reduce the legitimacy of At-Large to be the representative of the interests of end-users. Turning At-Large into an individual member (only) organization may convert it into an organization whose members use the At-Large to campaign for anti-user issues instead of supporting end-users within the principles of At-Large. This also will reduce diversity since individuals in the developing countries are not as connected and as informed as those of the global north.

We could not understand the rationale behind removing At-Large Working Groups (WGs). WGs constitute the base forum for end-users to voice their thoughts, discuss their concerns in relation to any given policy being discussed at ICANN, and frame agreements and strategies on how to positively impact the policy development process to the benefit of Internet end-users.

We strongly disagree with the recommendation to make the NomCom involved in the selection of the Board member selected by At-Large (seat #15). The NomCom already appoints two-thirds of the ICANN Board voting members, which is half of the total number of directors, and should not be given any role in the seat #15 selection process. Moreover, we wouldn't accept that a Board member be selected systematically by a random draw. For the record, the other Supporting Organizations/ Advisory Committees (SO/AC) appoint their board member(s) as per their rules. At-large should not be different.

The recommendation of replacing the ATLAS summits by regional meetings is not logical since it will prevent the At-Large community from meeting face to face. Only members of the same region can do under the so-called EMM. We prefer the status quo that allows periodic regional meetings and ATLAS global summits.

Finally, we would like to express our deep concern about the future of the At-Large community if this report is accepted and implemented as is. At-Large should remain the home of real and verifiable end-users defending no other interest than the public interest.

We regret that the At-Large community is now pushed to spend their volunteer time and energy in defending their existence rather than accomplishing their mission as stipulated in the ICANN bylaws.