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## Arabic Internet Domains to Reshape Online Landscape

### ICANN Introduces New Domain Name Programmes at Meeting in Abu Dhabi

**Abu Dhabi, UAE (August 4, 2009)** – The Internet address system will soon be open to greater customisation and localisation through two new initiatives unveiled to Arab audiences today by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), a global not-for-profit public-benefit corporation that oversees the coordination of international IP addresses and domain names.

ICANN's new Internationalised Domain Name (IDN) programme and the generic top-level-domain (gTLD) programme reflect the growing ubiquity of the Internet on a global scale and demands for new ways to customise its application. Today's meeting in Abu Dhabi is part of a series of global meetings hosted by ICANN for members of the Internet, government and business communities to familiarise international audiences with the new programmes.

The IDN programme allows for the introduction of Internet address names formed from non-Latin based languages, including Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Russian. Internet penetration in the Middle East is currently at 23 per cent of the population, representing user growth in excess of 1,250 per cent since the

year 2000\* and continuing to demonstrate dynamic uptake in many areas of the region. Growing use of the Internet has been further driven by availability of online Arabic language content and applications, and will receive a further boost from opportunities for local and international brands and organisations to attract new audiences with local language domain names.

In conjunction, the new gTLD addresses - that portion of a web address name that is to the right of the dot (i.e., .com, .org, .asia, etc) – will expand on the existing 21 domains available for registration. ICANN is proposing that the limitations be lifted and the opportunity for new gTLDs be expanded to allow all varieties of names and words. The corporation expects to receive hundreds of applications when it opens up the first round of applications for new gTLDs as early as next year.

“Innovation is not something driven simply by demand in a marketplace, it is also provided by the opportunities in the structure of the marketplace and the technology available,” said Karla Valente, Director of Communications Product Services, ICANN. “The Arab world will now have access to Arabic language domain names for the first time ever. This is a ground-breaking development that marks the next stage in the evolution of the global Internet and eliminates another barrier to its use by groups of society. Entrepreneurs and community leaders will drive new possibilities in this environment of innovation, which is an important part of the IDN programme.”

The impact of these new programmes is expected to be significant in the Arab world, growing the number of people who will be able to access the Internet completely in their native language. The programmes will also allow greater options for local and international companies and brands that are considering extending their online presence in the region.

“Companies can establish their brand online in the name they’re best known to their target audience. Today, when some companies begin to build their online presence, they are forced to use English-language names which may not be familiar. This creates a significant psychological barrier to entry and represents a missed opportunity for both the business and its consumers,” says Baher Esmat, Manager, Regional Relations – Middle East for ICANN.

The initiatives have been in the works for several years. ICANN has taken comments and suggestions from the public, business and all varieties of stakeholders.

The new IDN web addresses are expected to be available later this year, with the gTLD application process expected to begin in 2010.

\*Source: [www.internetworldstats.com](http://www.internetworldstats.com)

- For more information about ICANN’s new gTLD program go to <http://www.icann.org/en/topics/new-gtlds/factsheet-new-gtld-program-12jun09.pdf>
- For more information about ICANN’s IDN program go to <http://www.icann.org/en/topics/idn/factsheet-idn-program-05jun09.pdf>

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#### **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](http://www.icann.org).