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## **Netizen Participation in Internet Governance<sup>1</sup>**

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I have been involved with “Internet Governance”, or areas of global Domain Name System management since around 1996. I was the Secretary General of Asia and Pacific Internet Association (APIA), which was the formal member of the Steering Committee of International Forum on the White Paper (IFWP), a global coordination effort to forge a consensus for the setup a new body to manage the DNS in 1998. IFWP was a global response from the Internet stakeholders to the call by the United States Government to “privatize” and “internationalize” the DNS management in an open and inclusive approach. We advocated the equal participation to the process and the body, eventually known as ICANN, from Asia and Pacific regional standpoint.

Here, I like to provide my proposal of putting the “Netizens” to the global governing framework of Internet we are tasked by the WSIS (World Summit on the Information Society) process<sup>2</sup>.

We are facing the new kind of challenge for the governance of the Internet. The Internet made it possible to send and receive information from anyone’s desktop, laptop, or even from mobile phones on the go, with minimal cost, very easily and instantly, to anywhere in the world, ignoring the geographic and institutional borders including that of the nation states. This fact poses trans-national challenges that are difficult to solve by applying the traditional “nation” based approaches.

Frankly, most of the current International or inter-governmental organizations were designed in the industrial age thus they are not ready to deal with these national or global issues efficiently and effectively. They are slow to identify the issues, slow to come-up with solutions, slow to agree each other, often constrained by national and bureaucratic borders, and too rigid to respond to the rapid, ever-changing technologies and their applications. For example, when they come-up with legal

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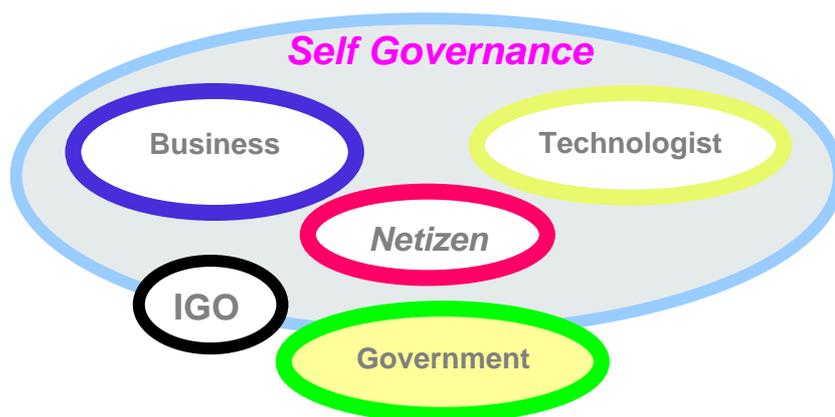
<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on a speech presented at the ITU Workshop on Internet Governance, Geneva, February 27 2004. This paper is still a work in progress and welcomes your comments, criticisms and suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> There is WSIS Civil Society Internet Governance Caucus which has more than 60 individuals from most of the regions of the world and worked very hard to contribute to the Civil Society WSIS Declaration<sup>2</sup> in its Internet Governance section. I suggest you to take the principles proposed there into serious consideration for the coming debate.

framework against certain types of spams, the spammers would be already well-ahead of the game creating new methods which is hard to trace and enforce. This is just a small example of the broader challenges we all face.

There is a clear need to establish a new governance model in which, the Netizens from the Civil Society should play a vital role, in cooperation with the government, international organizations, business sector and technical community.

The diagram below shows the framework I propose in which “self-governance” will take place. It is mostly carried out by the coordination and collaboration of all stakeholders: business entities who are mostly provider of services in the marketplace, along with technologist who develop the technical standards and manage administrative and operational functions of the network. Government can give legal and policy framework but it is better to keep minimal interventions. Intergovernmental bodies and international organizations have their roles, as well.



What is necessary here is the participation of the Netizens.

First and foremost, Internet is becoming everyday tool, or commodity, for most of us in the world. In Japan, over 60% of population or 70 million people are now using the Internet one way or another, and 70% of subscribers are now enjoying the high-speed broadband connection, which gives you “always-on” feature. Korea has the highest penetration of broadband, with more than 80% penetration to the household and their actual usage is very very high. China, now reached the number 2 place in terms of number of Internet users, 80 million people, after the United States. The development of I-mode in Japan gave rise to mobile phones for using services over the Internet, opening up the age of *ubiquitous* or *pervasive* networking. The Internet empowers ordinary citizen

with tremendous power – sending thousands of e-mails to millions of people at a cost of few dollars, sending both positive messages as well as destructive viruses.

With this potential, million of users are facing or creating societal challenges: in Japan, victims of online dating services with mobile or ordinary Internet is on the rise, targeting young women in schools with more than 100 serious criminal cases a year. P2P file exchange is posing threat to commercial copyright holders, but it is also opening up new and creative way of sharing works among citizens. Compared with these challenges, Domain Name and IP address management has far less serious problems now, but we may face more challenges.

For any Internet governance model to work, it should fit with the reality of local and regional situation. As I have been working for the Internet community in the Asia Pacific region, I like to bring your attention to the very divers situation of Internet development in our region, from highly developed places such as Japan or Korea to just in their infancy in Afghanistan, East Timor and Iraq suffering from the wars and conflicts, or tiny economy of Bhutan or many other LDCs. Though Internet has been mostly developed by the Internet community in many Asian countries, similar to that of developed countries, I could say that governments play greater role in supporting the Internet in infrastructure and capacity building activities in this region.

In the case of Asia Pacific, there has been a very strong tradition of voluntary coordination and cooperation among the Internet community. Here are all the “AP” organizations working on different areas of Internet management, from address and Domain Name management to infrastructure development or spam or security matters.

### Asia Pacific Internet Organizations

APNG (Asia Pacific Networking Group)	An Umbrella body for all others
APNIC (Asia Pacific Network Information Center)	IP Address Registry
APRICOT (Asia Pacific Regional Internet Conference for Operational Technology)	Annual Summit Conference
APTLD (Asia Pacific Top Level Domain)	ccTLD group
APAN (Asia Pacific Advanced Networking)	International Research Group for High-speed networking
APCAUCE (Asia Pacific Coalition Against Unsolicited Commercial Email)	Voluntary coordination group against spams
AIII (Asia Internet Infrastructure Initiative)	Satellite based high-speed connectivity project for developing countries
AP Cert (Computer Emergency Response Team)	Security related Task force
AP* (AP Star)	Joint coordination meeting of all APs

We have annual summit called APRICOT which was first hosted in 1996 and acted as the coordination catalyst until now for many Internet activities in the region. This voluntary coordination is appreciated by governments but receiving no control nor much financial support at all. It is working just fine.

We should try to follow the governance model after the working architecture of the Internet which is based on the layered structure. Functions of each layer are different, so the governance models should also be different, suited to the distinct characteristics of the layer it belongs to. It is also necessary, however, to bring coordination among different actors at different layers together.

### Emergence of Netizen

The word "Netizen" was first coined by a 23-year old student, late Michael Hauben of Columbia University in New York in 1993. He was trying to identify the new residents of the network community and invented the term "Netizen", a short for "Net Citizen". These active users of the computer networks were originally found in the technical community, but they now have spread into the civil society at large. Netizens are the main actor of the Information Society, as Prof. Shumpei Kumon of GLOCOM offered the theoretical analysis that in the Information Society, the social games are played around the *intellectual* values, not physical or property values like the industrial society. We see very active groups of Netizens affecting the society like the slash-dot in US or 2-channel, its counterpart, in Japan. We know many political activities are generated from online forum in Korea, where Netizen already became a common Korean term, affecting the outcome of the presidential campaign. In China, people are now starting to use online forum to criticize the government (sometimes). The rise of Netizens using mobile phones is articulated by Howard

Rheingold in his book *Smart Mobs*, which showed the potentially large positive and negative impacts of using these cheap, open, mobile technologies.

Why should we let Netizens to participate this global governance of the Internet? First, for any democratic governance it is necessary to establish the *Consent of the Governed*, a basic principle of the governance. But we should go further more. The Netizens are the main actor of the Internet development, as they are the great inventor and innovator of such tools as World-Wide Web (WWW) invented by the physics researcher Tim Berners Lee, Mosaic and Netscape browsers developed by undergraduate students of University of Illinois led by Marc Andreessen, Yahoo was started as their hobby and later created as a real business by David Filo and Jerry Yang, students at Stanford university. ICQ, Amazon and e-Bay are all developed mainly by users of the Internet, not technology-driven engineers. Missing them from the governance structure is like playing the football game without any top-notch players. Third, decisions around Internet governance will affect so many end-users directly. One needs to listen to those who are affected by the decisions it makes.

Netizens acts as watchdogs, or functions to provide appropriate Checks and Balances, to counter interests of others such as provider of services, business and government. By involving them, they will also have more sense of responsibilities.

Let us also examine positive merits of having Netizens to participate in the governance.

First, Netizens have direct knowledge and rich experience of most issues caused by the use of the Internet. If you are the parents, quite often your children know much better about using the Net than you are. Likewise these active users are well aware of the challenges they are facing since most often they are part of actors who create these challenges themselves.

Second, Netizens are flexible, work more efficiently than many incumbent institutions where protocols and procedures take up too much time and process hence acting as barriers against timely decisions.

Third, Netizens are global citizens, not constrained by national boundaries. There are many communities of interest, spread globally, irrespective of geographic or other existing social boundaries. They will function complementally to the existing border-based management framework of international inter-governmental regime, *not* as opposition to them or undermining them.

Netizen participation will increase diversity. By making regional balance as compulsory, Netizens from all the regions of the globe will participate in the governance activities. Netizens will counter

economic balance, not dominated by large corporate interest, but adding non-profit, non-governmental forces. It will also provide cultural diversity with their multilingual and multi-cultural environment. It will reduce the marginalization of the minority, too. By encouraging the Netizens to participate in governance, affirmative efforts to listen to the minority groups, persons with disabilities, women in vulnerable situations, linguistic minorities, all will have more opportunities for their voices to be heard.

Netizens share the view with the technical community that freedom at the edge of the network should be the core value of the Internet. Traditional telecom operators and mobile phone operators on the other hand may not necessarily share this vision. They tend to keep the central control and close the network which is convenient for the operators as well as many “passive” consumers. We are concerned that it may stifle the innovation and development of the Internet we have enjoyed so much so far.

There are risks of excluding Netizens from the global governance mechanism. We should consider these potential risks, too. If we only rely on technologists, they may lack the human viewpoints and tend to think things mechanically. If we rely too much on corporations, aspects of human rights might be compromised in the name of profit-making. Privacy protection and respecting freedom of speech may be less protected. And if we rely too much on government or bureaucratic mechanism, then we may face narrow “top-down” approach or closed decisions.

In conclusion, we need to put Netizens into the self-governance mechanisms. This will help solve the dichotomy of private-sector only approach vs. strong government involvement. It will create appropriate, more balanced structure. There are active Netizens in the developing parts of the world who will also enhance the balanced participation.

In order to make effective participation of the Netizens, their autonomous, distributed and collaborative network of networks is necessary to exist. Efforts at ICANN AtLarge is one such example, trying to be bottom-up, coordinated globally, based on the subsidiarity principle, that addresses the local issues be solved locally first, seek for global solutions for only globally challenging issues. We also need to establish self-certification mechanism in place that works to provide legitimacy to the Netizens themselves.