Middle East and Adjoining Countries Regional Strategy for Fiscal Years 2021-2025

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1. Executive Summary

In an effort to align ICANN's latest global Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2021-2025 with regional needs and demands, a group of community members came together under the support of the Global Stakeholder Engagement team for the Middle East (GSE Middle East) to develop a new engagement strategy for ICANN in the Middle East. This strategy will align with ICANN's 2021-2025 Strategic Plan.

After several consultations, the group agreed that the following four of the five strategic focus areas are of relevance to the region:

1. Security
2. ICANN's Governance
3. Unique Identifier Systems
4. Geopolitics

Under each strategic focus area, the Middle East and Adjoining Countries Strategy Working Group (MEAC-SWG) identified a subset of goals relevant to the region, adapting them to fit the needs and demands of the region. This followed identification of targeted outcomes and action items for each strategic focus area to help guide the implementation phase.

In executing this regional strategy, a detailed action plan will be developed annually. This plan will further detail the actions listed in this strategy document, and will be an ongoing, organic document that is regularly revisited to ensure it accurately reflects our external stakeholders, partners, and positioning of ICANN.

2. Introduction

The Middle East and Adjoining Countries Regional Strategy for Fiscal Years 2021-2025 is the third strategy developed to drive ICANN's engagement efforts in the region. The two previous strategies were:

1. 2013-2016 Middle East Strategy
2. 2016-2020 Middle East and Adjoining Countries Strategy[1]

2.1 Strategy Working Group: Background and Terms of Reference

In September 2019, after close coordination with the 2016-2020 MEAC-SWG, a public call was made to onboard community members for developing a new regional strategy aligned with ICANN's 2021-2025 Strategic Plan.

In October 2019, the newly established MEAC-SWG[2] was formed, and tasked with developing a new engagement strategy for ICANN in the Middle East. The initial work revolved around:

- Updating the Charter for the MEAC-SWG to fit its needs.
- Acquainting the MEAC-SWG members with the ICANN 2021-2025 Strategic Plan.
- Acquainting the MEAC-SWG members with the ICANN 2016-2020 MEAC Strategy.

The MEAC- SWG initially agreed on:

- Confirming the SWG name as "Middle East and Adjoining Countries Strategy Working Group (MEAC-SWG)".
- Defining the term of the strategy to run for five years concluding 30 June 2025.
- Appointing a Chair and a Vice-Chair through nominations and elections. This resulted in the appointment of Rafik Dammak from Tunisia as Chair, and Hadia Elminiawi from Egypt as Vice-Chair.
- Key timelines:
    - Release draft strategy for public comment by February 2020.
    - Hold a public consultation session at ICANN67 in Cancún, in March 2020.
    - Finalize the strategy document by the end of April 2020 and subsequently, working on the "Year One" Action Plan.

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[1] Please refer to Annex A for further details.
[2] MEAC-SWG members and observers are listed in Annex B.

2.2 Geographic Scope

The strategy covers 22 Arab countries, that are members of the League of Arab States3, in addition to Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey.

2.3 Alignment with ICANN's 2021-2025 Strategic Plan

The MEAC-SWG studied ICANN's 2021-2025 Strategic Plan, and its relevance to the region. The MEAC-SWG also explored if there were areas not covered by ICANN's 2021-2025 Strategic Plan that might be important for the region to address in the regional strategy.

The MEAC-SWG reached consensus on the strategic focus areas and respective goals as shown in Section 3 below.

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3 Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

3. Strategic Focus Areas

The MEAC-SWG identified four strategic focus areas of relevance to the Middle East. Under each strategic focus area, regional goals were identified along with their targeted outcomes and action items.

In executing the regional strategy, a detailed Action Plan will be developed annually. This will provide further details on the implementation of the action items listed in the strategy document, as well as any potential additional items.

3.1 Security

3.1.1 Strategic Objective

Strengthen the security of the Domain Name System (DNS) and the DNS Root Server System.

3.1.2 Regional Goals

- Support the development of technical capacities and the building of regional network(s) of technical experts to further strengthen the security of the DNS in the region.
- Identify and mitigate security threats to the DNS through engagement with relevant stakeholders.

3.1.3 Targeted Outcomes

- Increased technical knowledge and skill level in operating and securing DNS infrastructures across the region.
- Increased level of awareness and knowledge about DNS security threats and mechanisms to mitigate them.

3.1.4 Proposed Actions

- Assess the regional needs in terms of capacity development, skills, knowledge and expertise.
- Deliver training, workshops, webinars, online courses, and white papers that would assist in raising awareness and/or building capacities.
- Deliver train-the-trainer (TtT) program where needed.

3.2 ICANN's Governance

3.2.1 Strategic Objective

Improve the effectiveness of ICANN's multistakeholder model of governance.

3.2.2 Regional Goals

- Support and grow active, informed, and effective stakeholder participation from the region.
- Take part in the improvement of ICANN's multistakeholder model; and share learnings and experiences at regional and national levels.

3.2.3 Targeted Outcomes

- Increased meaningful stakeholder participation. Use active community members engaged in ICANN's multistakeholder processes as an example.
- Increased awareness and understanding of ICANN's multistakeholder model across the region.

3.2.4 Proposed Actions

- Increase community members' participation from the region in ICANN's policy making processes.
- Support and provide contributions, when needed, to regional activities organized by ICANN's Supporting Organizations and Advisory Committees (SO/ACs)[4].
- Promote ICANN programs such as – the Fellowship program, NextGen program, Community Regional Outreach program (CROP), and others that could come up.
- Organize, support, and participate in relevant regional activities to raise awareness of ICANN's role and encourage participation in its work.

3.3 Unique Identifier Systems

3.3.1 Strategic Objective

Evolve the unique identifier systems in coordination and collaboration with relevant parties to continue to serve the needs of the global Internet user base.

3.3.2 Regional Goals

- Support the use of Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs) in the region.
- Promote readiness for Universal Acceptance (UA) and encourage stakeholders from technology developers, service providers, and policy makers to consider UA implementation.
- Inform regional stakeholders about the new round of generic top-level domains (gTLDs).

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[4] SO/ACs examples- regional at-large structures (RALOs), non-commercial stakeholder group (NCSG), country code top-level domains (ccTLDs), business and commercial users' constituency (BCUC), Internet service providers and connectivity providers constituency (ISPCP).

- Encourage the deployment of latest standards and protocols related to the unique identifier systems within ICANN's remit.
- Promote ICANN's role as it relates to the unique identifiers within the multistakeholder community.

3.3.3 Targeted Outcomes

- Increased awareness about IDN implementation, UA, and the new round of gTLDs.
- Increased adoption of IDNs and UA in the region.
- Informed and equipped regional community on the new round of new gTLDs and the process.
- A healthy DNS environment that embraces the latest standards and protocols.

3.3.4 Proposed Actions

- Deliver trainings, workshops, webinars, online courses, and white papers that would assist in raising awareness and building capacities around new gTLDs and IDNs.
- Promote the work of Universal Acceptance of gTLDs to relevant stakeholders and work closely with the Universal Acceptance Steering Group (UASG) and UA Ambassadors.
- Promote the adoption of new DNS-related standards and protocols.
- Continue to work and collaborate with the DNS Entrepreneurship Center (DNS-EC).

3.4 Geopolitics

3.4.1 Strategic Objective

Address geopolitical issues impacting ICANN's mission to ensure a single, globally interoperable Internet.

3.4.2 Regional Goals

- Monitor legislative efforts that could impact ICANN's mission or operations on both the national and regional levels.
- Work with ICANN's Supporting Organizations and Advisory Committees to expand outreach to the wider community and engage with all stakeholders in relation to ICANN's mission and policy making.

3.4.3 Targeted Outcomes

- Have a process in place, in collaboration with community members, to monitor legislative efforts in the region in relation to ICANN's mission.
- Increased awareness and understanding of the role of ICANN among policy makers and regulatory authorities.

3.4.4 Proposed Actions

- Offer technical expertise to inform policy makers and other relevant stakeholders of the potential impact some regulations and legislations may have on the DNS and its global operation.
- Provide summary reports highlighting developments in relation to DNS-related regulations and legislation in the region.

NOTE: ICANN's 2021-2025 Strategic Plan has a fifth strategic focus area called "Finances". The MEAC-SWG suggested the following on this item:

"*To continue its role in supporting the implementation of the regional strategy, the MEAC-SWG will provide input regarding the predictable funding projections related to the different regional activities and assess those projections and requirements throughout the implementation phase*".

4. Annex A - Review of the Previous Regional Strategies

4.1 2013-2016 Middle East Strategy

After the conclusion of the 2013-2016 Middle East Strategy, a thorough review was conducted. This can be found here. Key achievements found included:

- The DNS Entrepreneurship Center (DNS-EC) inaugurated in 2014.
- The annual Middle East DNS Forum established to offer industry-related discussions and networking opportunities with local and international experts. During this strategy term, the Forum was held in, UAE (2014), Jordan (2015), and Tunisia (2016).
- The study on the DNS market in the Middle East, commissioned and released in 2015.
- The Task Force on Arabic Script Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs) (TF-AIDN), a community group established to promote the use of Arabic IDNs. A major accomplishment during this period, was the development of Arabic Script's Label Generation Ruleset (LGR), the first to be integrated into the Root Zone LGR.
- The Middle East and Adjoining Countries School on Internet Governance (MEAC-SIG), a capacity development program helping the regional community better understand Internet governance. The program also facilitates community engagement in related forums at national, regional and international levels. During the term of this strategy, two editions were held: Kuwait (2014) and Tunisia (2015).
- Formation of key partnerships through Memorandums of Understanding with:
    - Egypt's National Telecommunication Regulatory Authority, supporting the establishment of the DNS Entrepreneurship Center.
    - Qatar's Ministry of Information and Communications Technology, promoting regional growth in the domain name industry and the global multistakeholder approach to Internet Governance.
    - EURid, advocating the use of IDNs and developing local expertise in DNS technical, policy and business areas.

NOTE: One ICANN public meeting was held in the region during the term of this strategy; Morocco (2016).

4.2 2016-2020 MEAC Strategy

The second regional strategy built on the first one, evolving existing projects and developing new engagement vectors as highlighted below.

Existing Projects:
- The DNS-EC:
    - Expanded its services to Africa.
    - Led DNS technical workshops, and Universal Acceptance projects.

- The Middle East DNS Forum (MEDNSF):
  - Four editions of the MEDNSF: Egypt (2017), Turkey (2018), UAE (2019), and Saudi Arabia (2020).
  - As a result of this annual event, some Country Code Top Level Domains (ccTLDs) in the region are looking into hosting an annual Domains Day event.
- Task Force on Arabic Script IDNs (TF-AIDN):
  - The TF-AIDN continued its work on Label Generation Rules (LGR) at the Second Level, in addition to its work on Universal Acceptance.
- MEAC School of Internet Governance (MEAC-SIG):
  - Four editions of the MEAC-SIG: Lebanon (2016), Turkey (2017), Egypt (2018), and Morocco (2019).
  - In 2018, the MEAC-SIG developed strong partnerships with the Arab World Internet Institute (AWII), ICANN, the Internet Governance Project (IGP), the Internet Society (ISOC), and The Réseaux IP Européens Network Coordination Centre (RIPE NCC).
- Enhanced engagement with the Technical Community through technical capacity development workshops, seminars, and talks.
- Engagement with Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) and CERTs through trainings and talks.

New Engagement Vectors:
- Annual "Middle East Space" sessions during the two main ICANN public meetings. ICANN60 in November 2017 was the first session.
- Readout sessions for ICANN Public Meetings held both online and face-to-face in Istanbul, Turkey.
- Academic partnerships:
  - Partnerships formed with Al-Khawarizmi Center for Computation (CCK) in Tunisia for seminars on ICANN, Istanbul Bilgi University in Turkey for ICANN Readout Sessions, and the Middle East Technical University (METU) in Turkey for Universal Acceptance.
- Annual surveys:
  - Surveys conducted to gauge the regional community's satisfaction in our regional engagement efforts and activities.
- Stronger partnerships with ISOC and RIPE NCC through:
  - Joint workshops
  - Contribution to their events
- Dedicated engagements with Civil Society and At-Large Structures.
- Remote engagement in countries we are unable to engage physically in such as Somalia, Afghanistan, and Yemen. Part of this engagement involves utilizing ICANN Learn.
- Workshops for Supporting Organizations and Advisory Committees:
  - Dedicated SO/AC specific workshops such as Governmental Advisory Committee (GAC) Capacity Development Workshops and the Generic Names Supporting Organization (GNSO) Workshop 2019.

NOTE: While not related to the strategy, two ICANN public meetings were held in the region during the term of this strategy; UAE (2017) and Morocco (2019).

5. Annex B - MEAC-SWG Membership

Members and observers of this strategy, along with their respective expressions of interest, can be found online here.

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