His excellencies, ladies and gentlemen

Happy 20th anniversary to everyone

I was fortunate to have witnessed the establishment of ICANN and pleased with how ICANN has helped many to contribute to the Internet

I'll make some remarks on the ever elusive yet critical digital divide and on the global agenda on Internet issues in general

The recognition of the "digital divide" by governments, UN and other inter governmental organizations soon after the Internet was introduced into the developing world, has helped a great deal in mobilizing resources to address the issue. Today, Technology is well mainstreamed in development programs and we

look forward to the UN 2030 Sustainable Agenda to make further advances

The Internet will no doubt strengthen the means of implementation of the development goals while ICANN has an interest in developing a more inclusive Internet on a technical level

The local action orientation of the development agenda is very well aligned with internet-works. Development occurs in country and similarly, networks grow at the edge, also in countries. This concurrence makes clear the special role of governments in developing innovative and inclusive digital economies in our countries

Access, connectivity and capacity are important parts of addressing the digital divide. This puts governments in position to provide leadership in determining what local policy or facilitation makes networks grow in order to benefit in development initiatives

In this regard we need to recognize that networks and infrastructure are not under one authority

hence cooperation among independent authorities is necessary to address issues. This calls for much more discussion than usual, hence multi stakeholder bottom up approaches to decision making is a good option. There are already local in country communities practicing these approaches for ccTLDs, operator groups, NRENs, CERTs and others. The success of the multi stakeholder approach depends on increased participation and balance of roles. Thus, an encouraging local policy environment will stimulate more community involvement in discussions to create more inclusive governance opportunities

IDNs offer enhanced access to the Internet by reaching out to new language communities and can also be used to preserve older and no longer spoken languages, especially from developing countries. However, IDNs do come with increased multilingual content. This raises a question to ICANN on how far willing to engage only at domain name or technically activate local content skills

Perhaps governments working with their emerging local internet ecosystem, should take on the role of continuously identifying candidate local languages and technically characterize them for inclusion on the Internet and participate in IDN work at ICANN.

Technical capacity building and communities that retain knowledge are good weapons to contain the digital divide. These are best performed at the edge. Thus a need of emerging economies to strengthen local technical institutions with best current practices and the know how to effectively combat the divide at where most needed

On our part in Africa the community reached consensus in 1998 to establish regional technical institutions that would build capacity and maintain communities. We have since been building operator groups, numbers registry, names registries and registrars, research networks and others in response. These institutions promote and support in country activities

ICANN's technical role in supporting identifiers has been strengthened with its regional engagement programs. We have to continue to find ways to amplify these regional activities to support more country initiatives.

While we desire to help "leapfrog" the digital divide, we have to do it in such a way that it preserves knowledge and experience. Every technology wave leaves behind some knowledge and experience which may be valuable in future waves. The real challenge of technical capacity building is how to retain this knowledge in the communities as we go through the waves, perhaps more quickly and with more participation

We commend ICANN and ISOC for their support in technical capacity building in Africa

We thank everyone for working against the digital divide

Thank you