

Middle East DNS Forum

TAG University | Amman, Jordan | March 9-10, 2015

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A special thank you goes out to the *members of the [Middle East DNS Forum Program Committee \(PC\)](#)* for working on developing the agenda for the second edition of the forum.

Meeting Report

The second edition of the Middle East DNS Forum took place in Amman, Jordan on March 9-10, 2015 with a generous host from *Talal Abu-Ghazaleh International (TAGI)*.

The 2-day forum covered 6 main sessions and 1 breakout session as follows (agenda found [here](#)):

1. The Internet Industry in the ME region and the Untapped Business Opportunities Available
2. New gTLDs: Experiences, and the Way Forward
3. Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs) – Lack of Utilization and the Hidden Potential
4. ccTLDs and gTLDs: Coexisting in a New Environment
5. Supporting the Domain Name Industry in Underserved Regions
6. The IANA Transition – What is in it for you?
7. A breakout session of 3 different tracks; Business, Policy, and Technical

The first session of day 1 covered the Internet industry in the ME region. Panelists shared their experiences on the history of the Internet in Jordan, the state of the domain name industry in the region, the role of the regional TLD organizations, and the state of e-commerce.

On the session on New gTLDs, various regional TLD applicants shared their experiences so far. A registrar also shared their experience with the roll-out of New gTLDs.

The session on IDNs covered topics such the history of IDNs in the region and the obstacles faced, the work of the Task Force on Arabic Script IDNs, the IDN World Report, and the report on Translation and Transliteration (AKA Transformation) of WhoIS Data.

Day 2 kick-started with a session on ccTLDs and gTLDs coexisting in a new environment. The session had panelists from ccTLDs, Registrars, and a regional reseller. This session had a lot of entrepreneurship spice to it, and did draw a good number of questions.

The session on underserved regions was another session that received some good discussions. The session also covered an update on the DNS Entrepreneurship Center (DNS-EC).

The final session of the forum was about the IANA Stewardship, and it was more of an educational session.

The forum concluded with a breakout session covering 3 topics; Business, Policy, and Technical. The discussions and interactions were quite lively.

All session recordings during the course of both days can be found at <http://amman2015.mednsf.org/en/session-recordings/>. Please note that the breakout sessions were not recorded.

The forum attracted around 80 attendees either attending physically or remotely. The breakdown of the stakeholder groups is roughly as follows:

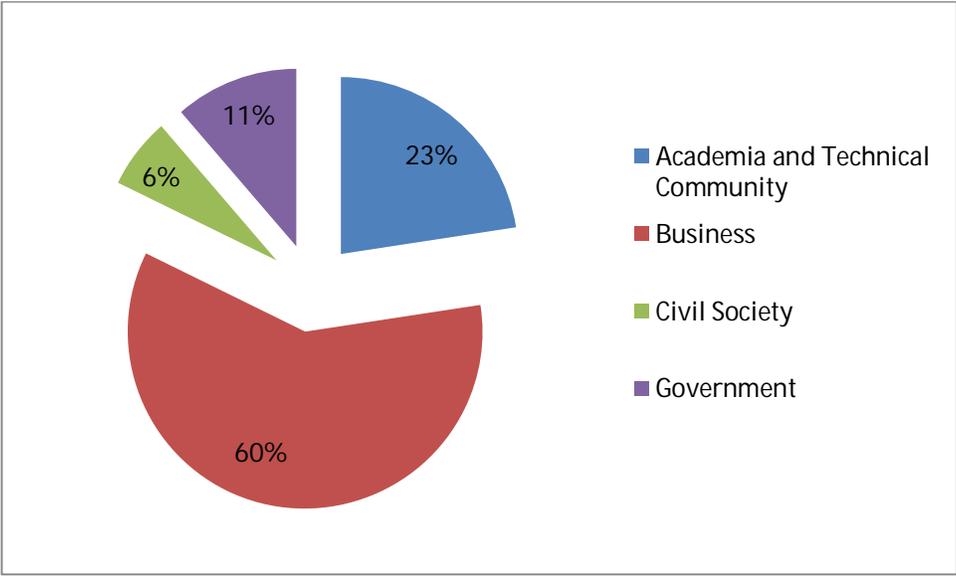


Figure 1: ME DNS Forum Breakdown of Attendees

Overall, the discussions were very lively as questions poured in both from the room and from remote participants. The majority of the panelists were attending the forum physically, while some presented remotely.

At the end of the forum, the attendees stressed the importance of such gatherings, and made some suggestions for future forums such as suggestions for other topics to be covered, as well as the need for more breakout sessions and group discussions.

Appendix A sheds more light on what each session covered.

Appendix A – Detailed Summaries of the Various Sessions ¹

Day 1 - Session 1 | The Internet Industry in the ME region and the Untapped Business Opportunities Available | 11.00 – 12.30

Moderator

Abed Shamlawi (COO, Oasis500)

Speakers

- Yousef Nussair (Freelance Consultant)
- Baher Esmat (VP Global Stakeholder Engagement for the Middle East, ICANN)
- Alaa Al Majed (Payment Manager, Gate2Play)
- Leonid Todorov (General Manager, APTLD)

Session Summary

- The session started by the moderator with an introduction of each of the speakers, the speakers highlighted their relevant experience in the internet industry
- Followed by an overview of the Internet in Jordan and how it started in the mid-nineties at the National Information Technology Center (NITC) and then expanded to ISPs
- ICANN provided a great summary of the Statistics on Internet Usage, the Domain Name Industry, Registries, ccTLDs and their operations, and ICANN Accredited Registrars
- HyperPay/Gate2Play then provided a summary of e-Commerce and Online Payment options and statistics in the Arab World and the focus on these areas in different countries
- Followed by great examples of Regional Top Level Domain Organizations by Mr. Leonid Todorov
- An example was also discussed of the barriers facing Internet domains registration in the Arab World and the relatively low growth percentage and how can new e-Commerce merchants and online businesses support the increase growth in internet and Internet domains
- The session proceeded to address questions and answers from the audience and then closing the session

Day 1 - Session 2 | New gTLDs: Experiences, and the Way Forward | 14.00 – 15.30

Moderator

David Olive (VP for Policy Development, ICANN)

¹ Summaries were provided by respective moderators and facilitators of each session.

Speakers

- Mohammad Zeidan (General Manager, ARI MENA FZ-LLC)
- Abdallah Albarrack (General Manager, DotMawqe Registry)
- Ben Crawford (CEO, CentralNIC)
- Michele Neylon (Managing Director, BlackKnight Solutions)

Session Summary

David Olive opened the session by noting that it has already been two years since ICANN announced the first set of Initial Evaluation results for new top level domains on 22 March 2013. Today, more than 500 top-level domains are now available on the Internet. Olive noted that the ICANN's new gTLD program was launched in response to the Community desire to expand consumer choice and competition in the domain name space as a way to foster increased Internet innovation and greater use of the Internet by new global entrants and users. Four business executives shared with the conference participants their experiences with the new gTLD program and how they see the way forward.

Mohammad Zeidan talked about an Arabic script only Top-Level Domain which is pronounced as "shabaka" in English given that شبكة is the most common term for "Web" in Arabic. The goal is to become the first choice for Arabic speaking registrants on the Internet before thinking about any other TLD. He said that advertising and raising awareness are needed for continued success.

Abdallah Albarrack explained that DotMawqe is a common Arabic term and the launch was a good one, though not the first with Arabic script to exist in the marketplace. The appeal is to provide a way to protect the Arabic names of businesses in the Middle East region as well as registered trademarks in the Arabic script.

Ben Crawford observed Internet users' attraction to certain new generic domain names such as .website, .xyz, and .site. Close collaboration between entrepreneurs using new domain names and experienced DNS business partners was most important for success in the marketplace. He said that future growth in this area would harness the power of large corporations and therefore move the current DNS industry into the larger ICT industry sector.

Michele Neylon noted that a "pure" registrar is rare as domain names are part of a bigger range of services being offered to customers. He said .com still remains the king in the DNS. His company is offering 300 new TLD extensions, though registrations are slow. He talked about the challenges for firms of matching what users want and how to market those new top level domains to customers.

Commons themes from the four speakers' presentations were:

Communications: raising awareness of the new domain names is needed through public relations in order to build brand recognition and trust for new names.

Cooperation and Collaboration: working together at the local, regional, and global levels is important; and partnerships between experienced DNS firms and new entrepreneurs are another way for success in the marketplace.

Sustainability: not clear the renewal rates for new top level names that are just coming into the marketplace; users' positive experiences and trust will be major factors in determining the sustainability of new domain names.

Evolution of ICANN Processes for new gTLDs: moving forward there will be a review of current new gTLD applications processes and procedures looking at ways to improve and streamline the system.

Day 1 - Session 3 | Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs) – Lack of Utilization and the Hidden Potential | 16.00 – 17.30

Moderator

Fahd Batayneh (Stakeholder Engagement Coordinator for the Middle East, ICANN)

Speakers

- Bashar Al Abdul-Hadi (Founder and CTO, KuwaitNet)
- Tarik Merghani (Founder and CTO, ISOC Sudan and .sd and .سودان Registry)
- Emily Taylor (Director, Emily Taylor Consultancy)
- Lars Hoffman (Director of Policy, ICANN)

Session Summary

This session kick started with the moderator explaining the difference between a “script” and a “language”. The moderator then introduced the panelists to the audience.

Mr. *Bashar Al Abdul-Hadi* spoke of his experience as one of the first ICANN Accredited Registrars to operate in the region. Back in the days, the accreditation process was more challenging than today, and so KuwaitNet was incorporated in the USA. He also shared his experience with IDN registrations and the Al-Tasjeel platform which provided an Arabic interface for domain name registrants.

Mr. *Tarik Merghani* gave an update on the work of the *Task Force on Arabic Script IDNs (TF-AIDN)* of which he is a member of focusing on African languages using the Arabic script. He shared with the

audience work undertaken by the group so far, as well as what work lies ahead. It was interesting to note the community-driven nature of the TF-AIDN.

Mrs. *Emily Taylor* shared the findings of the IDN World Report 2014 of which she is a lead author. The Report; which is produced by EURid and UNESCO with the cooperation of VeriSign Inc., indicates that IDNs are closely correlated with multilingual web content, and tend to be hosted in countries where the spoken languages match the script of the domain name. In the Arab region, numbers of registered domains are comparatively low, while use of social networks is high. More liberal domain name registration policies (e.g. in Qatar, Iran, and the UAE) can stimulate growth, and the region is showing leadership in research on universal acceptance of IDNs (Saudi Arabia).

Mr. Lars Hoffman shared the work undertaken on Translation and Transliteration of WhoIS (AKA Transformation of WhoIS). The WhoIS of today as we know can be entered and accessed using ASCII characters. But with the introduction of IDNs and more demand from Law Enforcement Agencies for such data in other languages, a working group was born to work on this initiative. While some in the community are happy to see this initiative, others are not due to the various problems implementing this initiative might carry with it.

There was a discussion at the end of the session on ways to improve user experience when it comes to using IDNs. While IDNs are underutilized, it has a huge potential of bringing the next billion Internet users online.

Day 2 - Session 1 | ccTLDs and gTLDs: Coexisting in a New Environment | 9.00 – 10.30

Moderator

Charles Shaban (Executive Director, AGIP)

Speakers

- Nabil Abu Sall (Director, .jo NITC)
- Munir Badr (General Manager, AE Server)
- Giovanni Seppia (External Relations Manager, EURid)
- Tom Barrett (President, Encirca Inc.)

Session Summary

- Nabil Abu Sall from .jo NITC gave a summary about the .jo registry including the Arabic IDN TLD (الاردن), it is still closed system so registrations very few (less than 4,500 domain names) but working on RFP now to adopt the registry –registrar model.

- Munir Badr from AE Server gave an update on the what happened last year after MEDNSF one, how they created their own niche and became one of the biggest registrars from UAE, although they are still a reseller for the generic TLDs (not ICANN accredited) but was able to become the third registrar in terms of .ae and hoping the same to be for .qa whom they became registrar for it recently.
- Giovanni Seppia from EURid gave a detailed explanation of .EU, how they started and policies adopted, what is changing and how they were able to become one of the largest in Europe.
- Tom Barrett from Encirca Inc. gave their experience as registrar was clear, Tom introduced the importance of "Positioning" as the most important factor for both gTLDs and ccTLDs. He mentioned how some new gTLDs will be targeting some ccTLDs clients that will be affected for sure.

In summary almost all agreed that both ccTLDs and gTLDs will co-exist, the main importance how to have clear policies, advantages and position themselves correct to their target clients.

Day 2 - Session 2 | Supporting the Domain Name Industry in Underserved Regions | 11.00 – 12.30

Moderator

Rafid Fatani (Principle MENA Public Policy Specialist, Access Partnership)

Speakers

- Daniella Andela (Registrar Services Manager, ICANN)
- Emre Sayin (CEO, IHS Telekom)
- Manal Ismail (Executive Director for International Technical Coordination, NTRA)
- Mahmoud Lattouf (Executive Director, TAG-Domains)

Session Summary

The main objective of the 'Supporting the Domain Name Industry in Underserved Regions' panel was to provide an overview of the wider internet Industry landscape, its diversity, opportunity and shortfall in the region.

Ms. Daniella Andela provided a comprehensive overview of ICANN's project roadmap.

Ms. Manal Ismail presented on the DNS Entrepreneurship Center (DNS-EC) that is established in Egypt with the main objective of fostering the DNS sector in Africa and the Middle East. Her presentation came in the context of a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) that was signed with ICANN at its 50th meeting in London and as an output of the ICANN Strategy for the Middle East.

Mr. Emre Sayin presented his experience on how do they see potential ICANN Accredited Registrars perceive ICANNs projected roadmap. Mr. Sayin's inputs were very valuable as it provided a different insight into the regions market, as Turkey is seen as a domain name market leader in the region.

Mr. Mahmoud Lattouf engaged the audience with his thoughts on what ccTLD registries can do to help support the wider DNS industry in the region. He discussed the changing nature of ccTLDs with the emergence of new gTLDs in the market.

The presentations from the panel speakers were well received, and the audience actively participated in the Q&A session. Challenges hindering wider ecosystem in the Middle East were raised. The audience also had an opportunity to discuss ICANNs project roadmap, and question some of the details from the ICANN report including the insurance policy request.

Day 2 - Session 3 | The IANA Stewardship Transition – What is in it for you? | 14.00 – 15.30

Moderator

Luna Madi (EMEA Communications Director, ICANN)

Speakers

- Theresa Swinehart (Sr. Advisor to the President on Strategy, ICANN)
- Mohammad Elbashir (ICG Co-Chair)
- Manal Ismail (ICG Member)
- Nurani Nimpuno (Head of Outreach and Communications, NetNod)
- Frederic Donck (Director European Regional Bureau, ISOC)

Session Summary

The panel guests provided a comprehensive overview, status update and timelines on the USG transition and the work on enhancing ICANN accountability. ICANN's Theresa Swinehart provided the background and overview, explaining the final process of elements of establishing the IANA Stewardship Transition Coordination Group (ICG) and the role of ICANN as a facilitator and convener of the process.

Mohammad El Bashir and Manal Ismail, both ICG members, explained the composition of the ICG, the Transition's proposal development and steps being taken to work on a solid final proposal amongst the Domain Names Group "Cross Community Working Group" (CWG), the Number Resources "Consolidated RIR IANA Stewardship Proposal Team" (CRISP) and Protocol Parameters "IANAPLAN Working Group" (IANAPLAN WG). Highlights were also provided from the Singapore

ICANN 52 Meeting that had taken place the month before. The focus was more on the Domain Names Community.

Nurani Nimpuno, a member in CRISP, presented an overall update focusing on the Numbers Community proposal. Discussed was the CRISP team and the process, followed by the key elements of the CRISP proposal. Fredric Donck focused on the importance of the multistakeholder process in implementing the transition, and why it is of import to follow in order to achieve a solid and successful USG Transition.

Overall, the Panel was an informative session for the audience.

Day 2 - Session 4 | Business Track Breakout Session | 16.00 – 17.00

Facilitator

Tom Barrett (President, Encirca Inc.)

Session Summary

The Business Breakout Session was well-attended and consisted of a lively discussion of the challenges facing businesses based in the Middle East interested in establishing an online presence and engaging in ecommerce.

Some of the challenges include: limited and expensive choices for locating web servers in the region, lack of payment gateways supporting local bank-issued credit cards, and lack of local Internet service providers and hosting companies.

The group also discussed the available options for domain names. Many of the ccTLD Registries have highly restrictive eligibility and naming policies. Several of the TLDs have had recent success with relaxing their eligibility requirements.

The adoption rate of new gTLDs, in particular the Arabic IDN TLDs, has been slow. However, some of the new up-coming new gTLDs that are local geo-names: such as city names or those targeting local ethnic groups, religions and cultures have the potential of siphoning existing users away from the legacy ccTLDs, unless the ccTLD Registries evolve to address the potential threat.

All agreed that the Middle East region would welcome innovation that would disrupt the status quo and spur new domain name registrations and overall internet growth.

Day 2 - Session 4 | Policy Track Breakout Session | 16.00 – 17.00

Facilitator

Emily Taylor (Director, Emily Taylor Consultancy)

Session Summary

Attendees of the breakout session on policy included representatives of registries, intellectual property lawyers, a registrar, a regulator, and some students. There was a lively discussion on a number of issues affecting the region.

The Tunisian registry shared its experience of liberalizing the .tn Top Level Domain. Changes included introducing a first-come, first-served system of registration, a network of locally accredited registrars, and a local dispute resolution service. Registrations have increased to 26,000 (compared with approximately 10,000 in 2012). The registry is hoping that registration numbers will continue to grow. The registry has also implemented the IDN ccTLD, but in common with others across the region, is finding uptake low at present.

There was a lively discussion about whether domain names can be regarded as property, with different views being expressed by the participants. One of the participants shared the results of his academic research on the topic - which indicates that courts have not yet found a single point of view on the issue.

The group also discussed the administrative burden placed on registrars as a result of UDRP (and related rights protection mechanisms). Again, different views were expressed by the participants. Industry actors indicated that such disputes drive support loads, not only with the administration of responding to the process - such as placing domains in lock status, or facilitating transfers - but more with supporting their customers who might have received UDRP proceedings, and helping them to understand the potential impact on their domain name. Others expressed the view that these were part of the costs of doing business, and that the support load was only perceptible once a registrar's business had grown to a certain size. The group did not reach a consensus view on this issue.

Day 2 - Session 4 | Technical Track Breakout Session | 16.00 – 17.00

Facilitator

Hisham Ibrahim (Regional Program Manager for the Middle East, RIPE NCC)

Session Summary

The technical breakout session had 6 participants representing 4 different Domain name operators.

During the session, deployment of IPv6 and DNSSEC on their infrastructure was discussed. There seemed to be an agreement that implementing them from the technical point of view of a registry

was not an issue. However due to the fact that the rest of the chain all the way down to the user does not support either technology, it is not high on their to-do list.

The above led to discussions on working closer with ISPs, resellers, and data centers on pushing the message of the importance of IPv6 and DNSSEC to the customers as well as bundling some services together to help with the uptake.

Then the topic of IDNs and specifically Arabic Script IDNs was brought up. There were discussions on experiences and best common practices in using open source and other registry software.