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Messages from Sharm el-Sheikh:

Comments from the UK representatives who attended the
Sharm el-Sheikh Internet Governance Forum, November 2009





Views from Sharm el-Sheikh

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The fourth Internet Governance Forum (IGF) hosted in Sharm el-Sheikh focussed on the overall theme of “Internet Governance – Creating Opportunities for All”. With more than 1800 participants from 112 countries and 96 governments represented, the fourth IGF had the biggest attendance so far – and, for many, it was the best meeting yet, with strong and constructive engagement on many key issues.

As in previous years, the UK had a good presence at the IGF, including four leading UK MPs: we were well represented in many discussions. This booklet highlights the views and ideas from some of the UK participants and the key messages that they took away from the meeting. But at best it can only be a partial overview of a busy conference: in addition to the main sessions, there were over 100 workshops, best practice forums, and dynamic coalition meetings.

For me there were a number of highlights:

- Undoubtedly the most talked-about initiative was the engagement with young people. I am proud that the Nominet Trust supported Childnet International in their work on this. Of course the real stars of the session were the young people, who were highly articulate and thoughtful and posed some real challenges for us all! I hope the IGF will continue to work with young people in Vilnius and beyond and that we can find new ways of hearing the voice of the child in the main stage debates.
- There was near unanimous support for an extension to the mandate of the IGF, a resounding vote of confidence that the IGF really is succeeding in establishing multi-stakeholder dialogue on public policy issues of Internet governance.

- Nominet organised a workshop on best practice, working with the Australia-New Zealand Best Practice Awards and the Manthan Award from South Asia – a truly international cooperation on best practice. We had an excellent panel with examples from the Nominet Best Practice Challenge (Rafi.ki and Childnet International). Lambert van Nistelroij MEP presented on a project for engaging elderly people and Andrew Miller MP talked about the Make IT Happy Parliament engagement with young people.
- Having MPs active in so many discussions is a big plus from the UK: this year there were also parliamentarians from East Africa and the European Parliament. In addition to Egypt, there was ministerial representation from Kenya, Australia, France, and Serbia.
- The inaugural meeting of the Commonwealth IGF was a great success, with involvement from East and West Africa, and the Caribbean. The UK has been involved in pulling together an important initiative that will help improve developing country engagement in the IGF.
- Suzanne Mubarak, Egypt’s First Lady’s special session was very powerful. It brought child protection very visibly centre stage and John Carr’s public challenge, that industry has to step up to the plate to make the Internet a better place for children, had a big and influential audience.

I hope that the contributions in this booklet, which come from across the spectrum of UK stakeholders, will give you some idea of the excitement and impact of this meeting. Next year the IGF returns to Europe, so I hope we will see ever-stronger UK engagement in preparing and in participating in an even more successful fifth Internet Governance Forum.

“The Internet Governance Forum in Sharm el-Sheikh pointed the way to the future, with a much more comprehensive attendance than in 2008 in Hyderabad and a greater sense of confidence for the future. The Hyderabad event was successful, but many people stayed away following the bombings in Mumbai and we lost some momentum. The 2009 IGF not only caught up, but demonstrated that new momentum is building up through the IGF process at national and regional level – for example through the East African IGF. So the IGF process no longer depends on one annual event, and there is gathering confidence in worldwide opportunities for cooperation between stakeholders.

In the UK, before going to Sharm, we undertook an open consultation with Industry, Civil Society and Parliamentarians as well as Government about the priorities for action. Security remains top of the agenda, with access and confidence coming next. Tackling online child abuse remains very high on our list of priorities and is now high on the international agenda too. There is increasing emphasis on bridging the digital divide and engaging the public – particularly young people. Our young people were very impressive in workshops led by Childnet and the Mubarak Peace Movement.

The Internet is a huge space where everyone grasps one corner of what is familiar, and it is very encouraging to see that there is an increasing willingness to admit that – even for experts – our knowledge is limited and our vision is only partial.

At Rio in 2007, on behalf of the UK, I made a commitment that the UK would demonstrate that the IGF approach works by establishing the UK IGF. We have built on the partnership activity

and multi-stakeholder cooperation that already exists in the UK. National IGFs are being developed elsewhere – not least Australia, Germany and France, with embryonic regional structures in Europe, East Africa, West Africa and Asia. Best Practice has been identified through the Nominet Internet Awards and there are significant developments at the sub-national level through the Yorkshire Business Crime Reduction Centre and the Wales e-Crime Forum – all of which we share on the world stage.

If the IGF is to grow and develop, we need greater high-level engagement from industry and for other national governments to match the commitment given by the UK government. The open and democratic approach of the IGF process is much better than the alternatives for everyone in the worldwide community, but business in particular has not yet fully realised that if the IGF model is not supported and embraced we risk a return of proposals to regulate the Internet via a centralised bureaucratic UN agency. Nominet, Intellect and the CBI (as well as some major players such as CISCO and Microsoft) are already involved – but for many others it seems that the penny hasn't yet dropped.

If best practice is shared worldwide and we learn from other countries our vision of the Internet as a good and safe place to be can be realised. Our partnership approach to cutting Internet-related crime is not just a way to fulfil the aspiration to “make the UK the safest place to do business online” but can show how joint efforts by Industry and Government – working with Parliament and “Civil Society” – can be good for everyone.”

Rt Hon Alun Michael, MP

“This year’s IGF in Sharm el-Sheikh was the best IGF yet with some really substantial exchanges. There was less criticism of ICANN this year, which I felt helped improve the atmosphere. The new Affirmation of Commitments, which replaces the Joint Project Agreement with the US Dept of Commerce, was widely welcomed as a real move towards internationalisation.

I was pleased to see some quite remarkable progress towards what amounted to almost a consensus on renewing the mandate. Even the Chinese delegation, previously the most outspoken opponents, was relatively subdued. However, we should remain aware that it is early days yet and those who would prefer to see Governments firmly in control of the Internet will not give up. It is important to remember that the decision on mandate renewal will be taken next year by governments operating in the highly political atmosphere of the UN General Assembly in New York.

The IGF is the best example we have of the multi-stakeholder approach in action. We must all work hard to preserve it. Governments should take the lead, but ALL multi-stakeholders should make their proper contributions. There is no room for complacency.”

Nick Thorne,
Former British Ambassador
to the United Nations

“Sharm el-Sheikh will stay in my memory for two reasons; the delight of swimming off the coral reef at daybreak and the contribution of young people in the fringes of the conference. The partnership between Childnet and Net-Aman created a stimulating session where young people threw down the challenge to the IGF to make sure we get things right in developing the future of the Internet. Nominet played a significant role again, not only financially but, more importantly, by acting as both a catalyst and intermediary in what proved to be a successful event. I believe the seeds have now been sown for a stakeholder driven structure to continue to be the basis on which the future of the Internet evolves.”

Andrew Miller, MP

“At the first IGF we tried to raise awareness of how Internet Exchange Points (IXPs) could help expand Internet infrastructure in the developing world. At the second and third IGFs, developing country regulators pondered whether they should be stimulating the creation of an IXP in their country. At this latest, fourth, IGF those same regulators wanted our advice about the most important policies to adopt to make their local IXP as successful as possible. This is real progress.”

Malcolm Huty,
London Internet Exchange

“This was my first visit to an IGF Conference though I was the only politician to attend and speak at an ITU Thematic Meeting on Spam in July 2004 during the preparations for WSIS.

I thought the Conference was poorly organised and too long; much of it could have been condensed into two days. The sessions had too many speakers and frequently left little time for the audience to ask questions. There needed to be an “Urgent Topical” agenda each day which responded to current areas of concern and interests of the participants and brought together interested parties. As Copenhagen was happening only a month later, it was deeply disappointing there were so few debates (only three major ones) about Green IT and the ITU-organised session that I attended did not prepare any input from their work to Copenhagen. A chance was missed.

Sharm el-Sheikh was largely a conference about ensuring it was given another mandate for five years which I felt would be two years too long. As it is a talking shop not a doing shop, it is a very costly affair and much of the work could be broken up into working groups which have a mandate to meet using video conferencing every quarter and to report back. But report back to a talking shop seems to sum up my nervousness about what the IGF is really for. Meanwhile, there seems to be an unseemly rush to create IGF forums across the world.

I think the United Nations should upgrade the ITU to embrace under its umbrella the IGF.”

Derek Wyatt, MP

“IGF has served as a forum for identification of important Internet Governance issues and the EA-IGF has, in the past two years of its existence, put a lot of effort towards making the connection between the global and the local “thinking globally acting locally”.

Challenges facing the IGF include, but are not limited to, building capacity for meaningful developing country participation at the global level. And for the IGF to be meaningful at the national/regional levels, which is the space that is empowered to make decisions and where multi-stakeholder processes have a real impact. Another challenge is reducing the complexity of the IGF schedule/workshops/meetings while ensuring a bottom-up approach.

The user/participant generated nature of the IGF is very important and regional/ national meetings should have a bigger role in setting the IGF agenda. MAG role should be redefined to incorporate the regional and national IGFs in a more concrete way.”

**Alice Munuya,
East African IGF**

“Measured by the number of workshops, dynamic coalitions and open forum meetings Sharm el-Sheikh represented a new high point for those concerned with children’s and young people’s use of the new technologies. But the centrepiece, without a doubt, was the plenary on the last day. For that we all owe a huge debt of gratitude to Her Excellency Mrs Mubarak. Mrs Mubarak is not only passionate about the issue of online child safety, she is also prepared to roll up her sleeves and use her leadership position to shape the global agenda.”

John Carr,
**Children’s Charities Coalition
for Internet Safety**

“Sharm el-Sheikh was a wonderfully exciting IGF for Childnet, as we were able to take the voice of youth to the IGF. We ran a joint session with the Egyptian Cyber Peace Initiative, featuring an international youth panel including two UK participants and showed a video of a range of representative voices from the UK. We were delighted with the positive reception that the voice of youth received and also the support from other UK and international delegates.

One of the key things that we discussed in the UK prior to the IGF was the contradiction between the desire expressed by young people for freedom, which sat at odds with their belief that they have an automatic right to be safe, and this message was reiterated in Sharm.

Some of the key messages we heard from the young people was that very often they are held up as the experts in this field, and while they undoubtedly do have a degree of expertise that is instinctive, one of the youth panellists reminded us that this is a new environment for young people and very often they too are learning on the job. However, while they may have not engaged on this topic in the past – they do want to engage in the future.

We hope to progress this work next year leading up to Vilnius and aim to get the voice of youth heard from the main stage.”

Lucinda Fell,
Childnet

“The 4th IGF was both an inspiring and exciting conference. We forget sometimes quite how young the Internet is, quite how quickly it has grown to be a fundamental part of so many of our lives. The IGF once again provided a crucial discussion space for the shaping of the Internet and in that, the futures of our economies and lives.

Several things struck me during the course of the conference. Firstly, was quite how far we still have to go. The majority of the world still does not have access, but it is coming and coming fast. What transformative power will it bring to such countries? What role will these newly connected nations play? How will it transform the lives of their people? The IGF has an important role in helping shape the future of the Internet and ensuring that the answers to these questions are resoundingly positive.

If the Internet has the power to transform lives, economies, even nations for the better, it also has the power to do great harm. None of us can have failed to see the recent coverage concerning predatory action on social networks, the proliferation of child pornography and those children’s lives who have been made a misery by online bullying. I was reassured by the prevalence that child safety took on this year’s agenda and heartened by many of the initiatives I heard about. These are not issues that are going away and they are not issues that can be solved by magic bullets, but the risks can be mitigated, incident numbers reduced and consequently fewer lives ruined. Ultimately, we need to make the Internet a safer place for all. The IGF once again played an important role in ensuring this.

Finally I was delighted to see Nominet highlighting the work of those doing exciting transformative projects using the web. There’s some incredible work going on. By highlighting these successful initiatives, Nominet has helped raise their profile, attract funding and, most importantly, share the secrets of their success so they can be learnt from and replicated.

Overall the IGF was a huge success, the remit was wide and the remit ambitious but large strides were taken and progress was most definitely achieved. Roll on the 5th IGF.”

Henry Warren,
Gemini

“It was clear from the impressive attendance at Sharm el-Sheikh that the IGF is not just an isolated conference. It is part of a growing worldwide conversation about how people communicate with each other across national, political, economic and social boundaries using the latest technologies that give them a common platform to do so. It is a conversation that increasingly shapes how business works, how human relationships develop, how organisations reach out, and how governments govern. Some of the conversation will be raw and challenging by its nature, but it is a conversation which will continue to evolve and to demand a space. The IGF gives that global conversation an invaluable expression. I look forward to sharper debates, more participation from groups who were absent and wider publicity for the core messages. And I look forward to taking part in future regional, national and international IGFs.”

Sue Baxter,
UK Department for
Business, Innovation
and Skills

“The IGF is a recognised platform for exchanging expertise, facilitating progressive debate, and fostering tangible collaboration at an international level. For the Internet Watch Foundation, the IGF is an opportunity to share good practice with partners and stakeholders from around the world who can inform and support the fight against child sexual abuse content on the Internet. The swift removal and strategic disruption of such material works effectively in the UK where we have tried to strike a responsive and informed balance between the protection of freedom of information and the provision of a safer Internet. Sharing what we’ve learned, how we work in partnership with the online sector, and engaging in key debates on an international platform can help develop the global response to what is a truly global crime; without transcending national boundaries there is a limit to what any one country can achieve. We would hope to see the expertise and ideas from the IGF feeding into policymaking and technical advancement in the area of online protection around the world.”

Sarah Robertson,
Internet Watch Foundation

“The mood in Sharm el-Sheikh was more confident than in Hyderabad a year before. Constructive developments in ICANN and the belief that the IGF formula was valuable within the United Nations framework were a helpful backdrop. I also detected that British leadership in promoting best practice rather than regulation, had been taken up as a theme by other delegations. This meant that many of the ‘fringe’ meetings were discussing practical issues. If there was an organisational problem, it was that the fringe took over from the main conference and too many meetings forget to address the question about relevance to the IGF process. This meant that coherence about governance matters was not always obvious – but this quibble is capable of being dealt with before the next conference.”

Ian Taylor MBE, MP



Looking ahead

With the next IGF taking place in Vilnius from 14-17 September 2010, the programme for the year is:

3 February: London

- Messages from Sharm el-Sheikh
- Launch of the Nominet Internet Awards – Promoting UK Internet Best Practice
- Launch of the UK-IGF Messages to Vilnius Blog consultation

9 February: Geneva

- IGF Consultation: Taking Stock and Preparing the IGF 2010 Meeting

(Followed by a meeting of the Multi-stakeholder Advisory Group 10-11 February)

1 April:

- Deadline for applications, Nominet Internet Awards

29-30 April: Madrid

- European Dialogue on Internet Governance

10 May: Geneva

- IGF Consultation: Preparing the IGF 2010 Meeting

(Followed by a meeting of the Multi-stakeholder Advisory Group.)

7 July: London

- Messages to Vilnius (afternoon)
- Nominet Internet Awards (evening)

August:

- Publication of the UK-IGF messages to Vilnius

14-17 September: Vilnius, Lithuania

- Meeting of the Fifth Internet Governance Forum

October: London (Portcullis House, Parliament & the Internet Conference)

- Messages from Vilnius

UK-IGF Blog

We welcome postings on the UK-IGF Blog (www.ukigf.org.uk) to identify key issues for the UK. As in 2009, when a number of people posted “think pieces” we will circulate input at the July event and use them to help inform the discussion on UK messages to Vilnius. We will compile the output in a booklet for use in Vilnius (in Sharm el-Sheikh we distributed over 400 copies).

Nominet Internet Awards

The Best Practice Challenge has been renamed the Nominet Internet Awards. A new name, but the intention is the same – to celebrate success and to showcase people and organisations that have made a real difference. Entries for the 2010 awards are welcome from 3 February to 1 April. Please submit your application online: www.nominet.org.uk/go/internetawards.



www.nominet.org.uk
www.ukigf.org.uk