

The ninth edition of the Internet Governance Forum will start at the beginning of September 2014 in Istanbul, Turkey. More than 3000 participants from all continents representing different stakeholder groups (governments, private sector, civil society, technical community, and academia) have registered and plan to participate in this annual international gathering exclusively devoted to Internet governance. Several hundred more stakeholders will participate remotely through a global network of regional hubs.

Why will so many government ministers and parliamentarians, CEOs and Internet entrepreneurs, civil rights defenders, scholars, engineers and other key stakeholders in the global Internet community devote one week of their time to engage in discussions about the future of the Internet?

The answer is clear – all of these stakeholders care about maintaining a free, open, interoperable, stable, secure and trustworthy Internet within a multilateral, democratic, transparent and inclusive framework of multi-stakeholder governance as defined by the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society and endorsed by the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in 2005. The IGF is a unique global forum for convening these multi-stakeholder discussions. It ensures the Internet continues to evolve in the global public interest consistent with these fundamental characteristics and objectives for the benefit of all Internet users.

The Internet governance debate has become ever more complex as we move from the discussion of infrastructure development into the realm of actual use and, unfortunately, misuse of the Internet.

The 2014 IGF will consider many complex policy issues, such as IANA stewardship transition and net neutrality. In addition, key questions such as policies enhancing access, growth and development on the Internet, bridging the digital divide, freedom of expression, privacy, and cultural and linguistic diversity will be extensively addressed.

The Istanbul IGF will be the first global gathering of the multi-stakeholder Internet community after the ground-breaking NETmundial conference hosted by Brazil in April 2014, which has become a reference point for multi-stakeholder cooperation exploring the boundaries of collective and democratic decision-making. The IGF was prominently supported by the NETmundial and the Istanbul meeting seeks to meet the high expectations of the Internet governance community.

The preparatory process for the meeting, led by its Multi-stakeholder Advisory Group and guided by the wider global community through an open consultation process, has introduced several important innovations into the program of the 2014 IGF. These include identifying more focused and concrete outcomes and the promotion of best practices on a range of important issues such as the multi-stakeholder model of Internet governance, child online protection, local content creation, ensuring security and combatting spam. The Istanbul IGF will also, for the first time, aim to coordinate and advance solutions to identified challenges, primarily through linking the annual global IGF with the many regional and national IGF initiatives which have emerged in the last 10 years. It will also aim to pick up and explore further issues at the invitation of other organisations and fora.

The IGF also strengthens remote participation opportunities in order to increase outreach and improve its capacity-building aspects.

The Istanbul IGF is taking place at a critical time for deciding the future framework of Internet governance. Next year, the United Nations General Assembly will complete the review of the implementation of the outcomes of WSIS – the “WSIS + 10 review”. Since 2006, many stakeholders have appreciated the successful evolution of the IGF as a truly open, inclusive and bottom-up multi-stakeholder process. The increasing levels of support and attendance bear witness to how the IGF has found its place in the Internet’s ecosystem. Shortfalls also have been identified and are in the process of being addressed. The key ambition remains, however, to ensure that all communities, be they in developing countries and small island developing states, or in the advanced digital economies, understand and recognize the value and benefits of participating in IGF’s discussions and contributing to its outcomes.

As the UN General Assembly examines the question of the possible extension of the IGF mandate for a further 5 or 10 year period, the IGF’s effectiveness will come under increasing scrutiny. Stakeholders themselves will have an opportunity in Istanbul to review the IGF’s role and its achievements, and to identify the scope for its further strengthening.

Let us all, individually and collectively, contribute to the success of the Istanbul IGF.