The Future will be shaped by the Internet and its Users

Remarks by
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Abstract

As the Internet has grown and evolved, it has become an increasingly important factor in global economic development and social progress. With this growing importance, the further development of the Internet itself becomes an even more important issue. The Internet Society believes that full participation in, and access to, the global Internet is key to the developmental goals of individuals as well as nations, and is essential to the Internet's own growth and evolution. The global Internet has always been shaped by its users, and broad participation in its evolution enriches the future for everyone.

Remarks as prepared

Dear Commissioners, ladies and gentlemen, it is a pleasure to be here today. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you about the future – our future and the future of the Internet, and most importantly the critical role individuals have in shaping that future. And, I would like to thank our hosts, the European Commission, Club of Rome and Sigma Orionis for the opportunity to contribute to this important discussion.

It should be very obvious by now, that the Internet is central to all economic development and social progress. Access to an open, global Internet is key to the developmental goals of individuals and nations, and this access in return is critical to the Internet's own growth and evolution, as the global Internet has always been shaped by its users. Empowering every individual on this earth to fully participate in its evolution is critical to our collective well-being and to creating the best possible society and the best possible Internet.

Next year, the Internet Society will celebrate its 20th Anniversary. Throughout our history, we have been devoted to a vision that: "The Internet is for Everyone". The Internet's true value is its nature as a catalyst for innovation, communication, economic growth and social development – all at unprecedented levels. The Internet helps individuals stay connected. It helps build communities – globally as well as locally. And, the Internet has shown time and again that it can help us to address important issues facing the world today. The Internet empowers people to make the world a better place.

A common set of values and principles has always characterized the development and operation of the global Internet. These are, inter alia: open standards, user centricity, freely accessible inclusive processes, and transparent governance. These are central to the Internet's development and ongoing evolution. The only true Internet is both open and global, and while we do not have time for this discussion today, this does not need to equate to less secure.

In considering the theme for this panel of "Looking at the Future of the Internet," I'd state it as the Internet and its users will shape the Future. While the principles endure, the Internet itself has always evolved. Pioneers working on the various projects that became the Internet achieved the truly remarkable feat of developing something that does not prescribe a future, but rather creates a platform for all of us to open the door to the future, supporting the evolution and proliferation of services, applications, and devices that best meet our needs and interests.

The exciting new applications and services being deployed today and the unimaginable developments of tomorrow will arise specifically from the Internet's intrinsic design principles, its open model and its building block layered architecture.

The Internet Society is devoted to ensuring the Internet continues to be open, to grow and to evolve – in harmony with user's needs because it is defined by users. That does not at all preclude roles for other actors – private sector and governments included - but it should allow all of us to do what we do best.

While many of us share this vision, we must not be complacent. The future path of the Internet's development is not guaranteed. There are forces that have the potential to undermine the Internet. These forces need not be motivated by bad intentions. In fact, they may be a result of a misunderstanding about how the Internet we use today came to be, and what has made—and will continue to make it— so valuable.

For most people, using the Internet is an experience similar to the way many of us enjoy fruit or flowers. We buy them at the market and bring them home to enjoy. The soil that nurtured them, the plants that produced them, and the work it took to bring them to our tables remain invisible to us. But the fruit and flowers would not reach our homes without the soil, the plants, or the farmers.

In a way, the same is true about the Internet. While we enjoy applications like email, or the World Wide Web, or the latest social networking service on our computer, phone, or other device, most Internet users are unaware of or unconcerned with the underlying Internet itself—or how the services they enjoy were created.

I made the following observation in 2009 at the Internet Governance Forum in Egypt, commenting on Eleanor Ostrom's work. She had just been awarded the Nobel Prize in economics for her work on common pool resources, and the Internet is just such a common pool resource with it's decentralized approach – enabling permission-less innovation and promoting shared responsibility for its development, operation, and management, all on a global scale. Her work showed better outcomes are achieved for a common pool when several factors exist, including the presence of a community with a strong social network and shared norms, and community-based rules and procedures.

An element of her work particularly relevant to all of us was to demonstrate how important it is for stakeholders in a common pool to know and interact with each other. Luckily, the Internet

facilitates this as never before. And forums such as Paradiso or the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) or any of the many others all further facilitate this. Furthermore, as we are in a common pool, we all have a responsibility to participate; to do what is right for the whole.

And, when it comes to realizing the future, we have only just scratched the surface. In a world of 7 billion people, where only 2+ billion are connected to the Internet the next frontier of Internet development will come from developing countries– and this is key to our collective future and to the future Internet. Only by preserving the open global Internet will the next billions emerge online, and will they be able to achieve a ubiquitous, reliable, sustainable Internet on a par with all countries in the world. While their creativity and ingenuity will propel nations' economic development, the most important contributions will arguably be in social progress. And, the broader benefit of this full participation ultimately accrues to all.

An implication of the Internet's effect beyond technology can, again, be seen in recent events in the Middle East and North Africa. While political scientists debate to what extent Facebook or Twitter tipped the balance towards popular movements in these countries, it is clear they played a role supporting free communications. Whether it is the protests in Iran in 2009, or the movements that started in Tunisia earlier this year, Internet-enabled communication was and is clearly part of the ongoing dynamic in those events, enabling people to connect with each other and share information—both within and beyond their regions—in ways that were not possible before the Internet.

The Internet is a platform that intrinsically enables new developments and hence is eminently suited to address current and emerging challenges, and not just technical or economic, but also social.

Beyond increasing deployment of the Internet to more people, there are some very clear implications for the kind of technology evolution the global Internet MUST adopt. For example, the next generation of Internet Protocol, IPv6, developed by the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) must be deployed to ensure that the billions of people yet to come online, and the billions of new Internet devices being created today, are able to participate in an Internet that retains the core technical *permissive* architecture it has today. Technologies, such as DNSSEC, (also developed in the IETF) which adds robust validation to ensure that Internet domain names always correspond to their expected destinations, must be deployed to help ensure Internet users are able to trust interactions over the Internet.

A quick note of welcome recent news with regard to IPv6. The Internet Society recently organized the World IPv6 Day, where more than 400 companies—including Facebook, Google, and Yahoo! —turned on IPv6 for a day. Many of our Chapters and members in the Internet Society organized supporting activities, including a number here in Europe and the European Commission participated as well. The good news is that among the thousands of participating websites, no major website reported any problems during the day. The great news is that most of the participating websites left IPv6 turned on after the event and the uptick in IPv6 traffic noted on the day has not declined.

But technologies are only an end towards enabling and promoting greater participation by people in the Internet. The development of communities, is equally important, to the continued growth of the Internet.

The Internet is a creation of its users. It is the Internet's users who "determine what the Internet will be". As individuals are able to apply their creativity and skills to the development of the Internet and new services, other Internet users are able to avail themselves of them. Services that individuals want thrive; services they don't want vanish. A stronger more diverse presence on the net provides solutions for a wider range of problems, in turn increasing the Internet's value.

The contributions of individuals have, in fact, created just about everything we value online today. It was 20 years ago that Tim Berners-Lee, a research assistant in Switzerland at CERN, connected hypertext technology with a nascent domain name system, launching the World Wide Web. A tiny website for friends at Harvard can explode into Facebook. Students who dream of all recorded knowledge being a mouse click away can build the algorithms that become Google.

This is the Internet's true identity – it is continually created and re-created by its users, FOR its users. Healthy competition, innovation, and greater trust through shared transparency are the proven rewards. Like the flowers and fruit, the Internet may seem to be always there for us, but they—and the benefits the Internet provides—require careful and ongoing cultivation. We must not take them for granted.

We face an exciting future and we, as Internet users, can shape it together. Together we can work to ensure the long-term health of the global, open Internet —for everyone.

Thank you.