26 February 2013

Over the past weeks and following on from talks at last year's ITU WTSA and WCIT events, both AFRINIC and the RIPE NCC have been asked to participate in discussions concerning the possibility of establishing a new Regional Internet Registry (RIR) for the Arabic-speaking community.

In the spirit of open community discussion both AFRINIC and the RIPE NCC felt that it was essential that we bring this to the attention of our members and community.

It is imperative to note that these discussions have not in any way been instigated by the management or staff of either AFRINIC or the RIPE NCC. The matter has been raised and promoted by representatives of certain governments in the Arab community.

AFRINIC is proud to serve the needs of its members in Arab speaking states, in Northern Africa and believes that the existing system can meet the needs of a growing membership from the region. Through its structure AFRINIC also allow the region to be well represented in its governing Board and has held several members meeting in the region since its creation in 2005.

As you are all aware, an RIR provides a range of services, including managing its service region's Internet number resources (IPv4, IPv6 and ASNs), maintaining proper records of all registry activities in a publicly accessible database (whois),as well as capacity building and training on use of these resources. RIRs also provide general support for regional Internet Infrastructure, and facilitate community discussion and engagement.

AFRINIC has played a vital role in unifying the policies that govern the entire Africa/Indian Ocean region and by lowering the entry barrier for all African operators to obtain their own Internet Number Resources has enabled smaller operators in the region to grow and develop.

AFRINIC has also contributed to forums including the African Network Operators Group (AFNOG), the African Top Level Domain Association (AFTLD) as well as the Arab, North African and African Internet Governance Forums. Through our involvement with these groups, we have supported the growth of the local industry and the development of an active professional community within the region. For example, AFRINIC's first IPv6 training forum took place in Sudan and since then we have had thirteen (13) workshops in North Africa, a sub region that has 2 representatives elected on AFRINIC's board. AFRINIC also has part of its Disaster Recovery based in Egypt.

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We have been particularly excited to contribute to the development of forums including the Middle East Network Operators Group (MENOG) and the newly Middle East Peering Forum where most northern African countries participate. Through our involvement with these groups, we have supported the growth of the local industry and the development of an active professional community within the region.

RIRs are community-governed organisations. If the multi-stakeholder Internet community in the Arab community feels that there is a need to establish a new RIR both AFRINIC and RIPE will be happy to support this development appropriately. There are steps, via the open, bottom-up policy development process, to facilitate this. ICP-2, "Criteria for Establishment of New Regional Internet Registries", is a global policy, approved through consensus by the communities from all the existing RIRs, which sets out this process: http://www.icann.org/en/news/in-focus/global-addressing/new-rirs-criteria

This, like all RIR policies, was the result of a “bottom-up" policy development, based on the premise that those who use Internet number resources and have a stake in the Internet, including actors from civil society, business, the technical community, government and law enforcement agencies (LEAs), should take the lead in developing policies relating to the management of those resources.

"Top-down" policies developed without the participation of those who operate the Internet carry the risk of significant unintended consequences for the Internet and its users.

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It is vital that the Internet technical community has a voice in deciding such an important issue. We encourage community members to raise any questions or issues on the AFRINIC mailing lists, or to email AFRINIC directly by replying to this email. We are also happy to assist anyone wishing to raise this issue at upcoming events such as MENOG 12 (5-14 March), the AFRINIC mini IG event in Tunisia in April or the AFRINIC meeting in Lusaka 9-21 June 2013.

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