

Internet still under US grip: forum delegates

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People learn to use the Internet in Gabon. The Internet is still under the control of the United States, participants at a governance forum said, despite a move by America to loosen its grip over the private corporation that administers the net.

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An agreement in September between the US Commerce Department and [Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers](#) created panels to review the work of ICANN in key areas, in a move designed to bring more accountability to the body.

But delegates at the [Internet Governance Forum](#) which closed on Wednesday in the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheikh said the body still exercised too much control and some called for it to be replaced with a international one.

"The US still has a strong stake in ICANN, as far as stakeholderism is concerned," Keisuke Kamimura, senior researcher at the Center for Global Communications, International University of Japan, told AFP.

"Regarding accountability and transparency, they have identified it as an issue to be reviewed, but more needs to be done," he said.

"The US still has a key to the back door" when it comes to [Internet](#) administration, Kamimura said.

The review panels will include representatives of governments other than the [United States](#), in response to calls for making the body more global.

Fuad Bajwa, a member of the United Nations IGF Multistakeholder Advisory Group and a member of ICANN told the forum the [developing world](#) needed to be more strongly represented.

"We, the people of the developing world, are there," Bajwa said.

"From my experience in ICANN, I saw less staff members from my part of the world," said the Pakistani delegate. "I saw less board members from the developing world."

One Chinese civil society group called for the body to be scrapped altogether.

"We want to have an international organisation under the framework of the United Nations to replace ICANN," said Chencqing Huang, head of

the Internet Society of China.

A California-based non-profit corporation, ICANN manages the Domain Name System (DNS) that forms the technical backbone of the Web and allows website addresses, for example, to be typed as words instead of a series of numbers.

Since 1998, ICANN has operated under an agreement with the Commerce Department's National Telecommunications and Information Administration.

ICANN says it is a multistakeholder body.

On Monday, the first applications were accepted for internationalised domain names (IDNs) in one of the most significant steps to making the Internet more accessible around the globe.

With the introduction of IDNs, scripts such as Chinese, Korean or Arabic will eventually be usable in the last part of an address name -- the part after the dot, as in .com and .org.

Egypt and Russia were among the first to apply to have their country code for top level domains in their own scripts.

"International pressure for the internationalisation of the Internet is starting to bear fruit," one participant told AFP.

But he said some countries, particularly countries not on friendly terms with the United States such as Iraq under President Saddam Hussein, or Syria and Sudan, "had difficulties in registering their domain names."

"Big decisions should not be unilateral but in consultation with the Internet community at large," the participant said. "The power and the

veto is still in US hands.

However, ICANN members insist that no country has ever been refused registration.

"There has never been a denial of a possible country code domain to a sovereign state" Jean-Jacques Subrenat, a board member of ICANN and former French diplomat, told AFP.

The IGF forum wrapped up four days of meetings on Wednesday in Sharm el-Sheikh where over 1,500 representatives of government, civil society and the private sector met to discuss the future of the Internet.

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