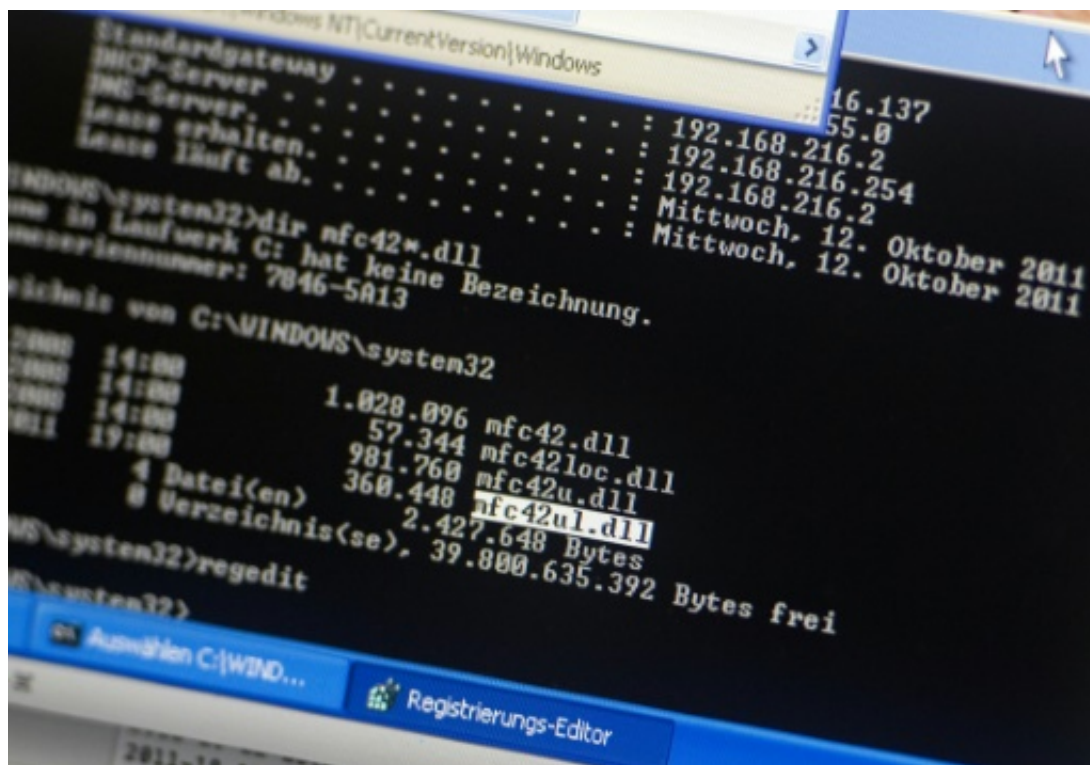# Internet address gatekeeper OKs plan to break from US (Update)

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 The gatekeeper of Internet addresses on Thursday approved a plan to break from US oversight, shifting those symbolic functions to the broader global online community.

The plan, which now heads to the US government for approval, aims to maintain Internet governance under a "multi-stakeholder" model which avoids control of the online ecosystem by any single governmental body.

The proposal crafted over the course of two years with input from businesses, academia, governments and others was endorsed at a board meeting in Morocco of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN).

"The mood here is a mixture of exultation and exhaustion," ICANN board chairman Stephen Crocker told AFP on the eve of the vote.

Work began on the transition plan in March of 2014, and it will be sent to the US government where it will be the focus of an internal review process expected to last about three months.

The ICANN board unanimously approved resolutions detailing the transition plan and directing that it be sent to the US government for approval.

The proposal "meets the needs of the Internet and its users," said Alissa Cooper, who chaired one of the groups that put the plan together.

The meeting was marked by a series of standing ovations as those involved with the process were thanked.

Won't change the Internet

The plan will not affect how users interact online, but will turn over the technical supervision of the online address system to ICANN itself, with a system of checks and balances so no single entity can exert control over the Internet, according to officials involved in the process.

The online address system managed by ICANN is currently overseen by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) at the US Department of Commerce.

Officials say the supervision is symbolic and dates back to the creation of the Internet. Yet ICANN officials maintain the new governance model will instill confidence around the world in the Internet's independence.

"This plan enjoys the broadest possible support from this very diverse community and I'm confident it will meet NTIA's criteria," said Thomas Rickert of the Cross Community Working Group on Enhancing ICANN Accountability.

If the US government approves the plan, then a contract between ICANN and the US government will expire on September 30 as is planned.

"Ultimately, this process is about stewardship of the critical functions of one of the most extraordinary human innovations," said Internet Society chief executive Kathryn Brown.

"It was right to entrust this important role to the Internet community."

Crocker did not expect internet users to notice any change, given that ICANN would continue to perform its job under a new accountability regime.

Awaiting US approval

While the US government considers the transition plan, ICANN will begin rewriting its bylaws to comport with the new structure of accountability.

"Those processes will proceed in parallel," Crocker said.

"There will be work to be carried out, then at the end of September and the end of our contract, we will operate without the involvement of the US government."

ICANN funding will continue to come from contracts with domain name registrars and registries.

Outgoing ICANN chief Fadi Chehade has described the organization as a "traffic cop" that ensures the Internet address system functions, and the US government's role as been merely to ensure that correct procedures are followed.

"People have aggrandized the role of the US government in what we do," he told AFP in an interview earlier this year.

"But, the change is actually minimal."

Chehade said that without US oversight, ICANN would be managing the technical functions of the Internet under the supervision of a board designed to maintain diverse representation.

"We have a very solid process that ensures this is not a capturable board," which can be hijacked by governments or other institutions, he said.

Some US lawmakers have been less than enthusiastic about the plan, fearful that it could allow authoritarian regimes to impose more controls on the Internet.

Last year, Republican Senator John Thune warned at a hearing that a privatized ICANN could become "accountable to no one."

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