

Internet caretaker ICANN to escape US control

14 October 2014, by Glenn Chapman



ICANN chief Fadi Chehade expressed his confidence in the move during a press briefing at the opening of the nonprofit organization's meeting this week in Los Angeles

The head of the private agency entrusted with running the Internet has said that the group is on course to break free of US oversight late next year.

Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) chief Fadi Chehade expressed his confidence in the move during a press briefing at the opening of the nonprofit organization's meeting this week in Los Angeles.

"ICANN is in a very solid, confident place today," Chehade said of its readiness for a 'post US-government role' in charge of the Internet addressing system.

The timeline for the shift is months rather than years, according to Chehade.

While cautioning that there was no strict deadline, he said that substantial progress has been made toward ICANN being answerable to a diverse,

global group of "stakeholders" and not the just the US government, as has long been the case.

The US government in March of this year announced that it is open to not renewing a contract with ICANN that expires in about 11 months, provided a new oversight system is in place that represents the spectrum of interests and can be counted on to keep the Internet addressing structure reliable.

ICANN plans to hand a proposal fitting the bill to the US Department of Commerce next year.

"If the US government is satisfied, they would not renew the contract," Chehade said.

"There are many people in the community who would like to see we not renew the contract past 2015."

If US officials are unhappy with the proposal, the contract could be renewed for a short period to allow time for it to be revised.



ICANN President and CEO Fadi Chehade speaks on internet governance during a discussion at the Hudson Institute on April 4, 2014 in Washington, DC

Grabs for control

As the US steps back from overseeing ICANN, states and corporations are grabbing for the reins.

ICANN has gone from being behind the scenes tending to the task of managing website addresses to being center stage in a play for power on the Internet.

"Governments want to exert control over the sweeping transnational power of the Internet that is effecting their policies, politics, social fabric and/or their economic conditions," Chehade told AFP just days before the group gathered in Los Angeles to tackle an array of hot issues.

"The other groups are large corporations concerned about security issues," he continued while discussing forces striving for influence over the organization.

"Therefore, they are stepping in with force to figure out how to reduce potential harm to customers and to their businesses."

Governance of the Internet will be a high-profile topic at the ICANN 51 meeting that will continue through October 16 in Los Angeles.

US Commerce Secretary Penny Pritzker addressed the gathering on Monday, affirming support for ICANN being accountable to the "global multistakeholder community" and not to any single organization.



Fadi Chehade (L), President and CEO of Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Domain, speaks during the opening of the ICANN Singapore meeting on March 24, 2014

"Let me be clear about this," Pritzker said.

"The United States will not allow the global Internet to be co-opted by any person, entity or nation seeking to substitute their parochial world view for the collective wisdom of this community."

The ICANN 51 agenda includes tackling whether identities of those running websites should be public or whether privacy should be safeguarded and operators true names revealed only with proper court orders.

Another hot topic is the historic roll-out of a vast array of new domain names that has seen controversy over website address endings such as .wine or .gay.

"There is quite a bit of thematic focus on the top-level domain space," Chehade said, referring to online neighborhoods making debuts.

"ICANN is not in the content policing business; this is not what we do," he added when asked about potential for some domain operators to allow inappropriate material.

"We just want to make sure the company that gets the domain can deliver on what they say and do it with reliability."

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