6 July 2021

To: ICANN Board of Diectors

Cc: Akinori Maemura, member of the ICANN Board

Communication from APAC Space to ICANN Board re ICANN72

 APAC Space is a community group in which community members of ICANN's Asia/Australia/Pacific Islands region from across the SO/AC structure come together to raise issues, share views, and coordinate activities. The APAC Space submits this statement to the Board for consideration in their discussions about whether to hold ICANN72 in the current virtual meeting format or move to a hybrid format that would allow for limited in-person participation.

As a starting point, we note that one of ICANN's Core Values includes "Seeking and supporting broad, informed participation reflecting the functional, geographic, and cultural diversity of the Internet at all levels of policy development and decision-making to ensure that the bottom-up, multistakeholder policy development process is used to ascertain the global public interest and that those processes are accountable and transparent".

Face-to-face ICANN meetings put all participants on an equal footing by overcoming time zone differences. The principal beneficiaries of a face-to-face meeting are those from outside the region of the meeting location, for whom attendance eliminates time zone disadvantage. In our opinion, a face-to-face meeting in which a sizable proportion of our diverse, global community cannot attend significantly disadvantages all those not in attendance.

Representation and participation in ICANN from the APAC region, despite many inherent challenges such as the region's vast geography, cultural and language barriers, and time zone differences, have improved significantly over the years. One of the reasons why APAC region members have been able to maintain active and regular participation across the wide range of ICANN community groups is the enthusiasm generated by attendance at ICANN face-to-face meetings. In-person attendance provides an environment for building collaborative relationships which contribute much to the ability to progress work within the community between face-to-face meetings.

During this time of hiatus from face-to-face meetings due to COVID-19, participation challenges in all regions have been exacerbated; in the APAC region, we are aware that the level of participation has declined. We are concerned that participation and engagement will decline further with the disadvantage of a hybrid ICANN72 meeting. Like the rest of the community, the APAC Space members are keen to see a return to face-to-face meetings, but we have serious concerns about continued, long-term disenfranchisement if this return is done in an inequitable way. If a hybrid meeting does go ahead in Seattle, we are reasonably confident that there will be minimal, if any, in-person attendance from the APAC region due to one, or a number of, the following reasons:

1.   Government travel restrictions, including US Government restrictions

2.	COVID-19 remains prevalent in some regions
3.	Slow vaccination rollout in many countries with 3-10% levels only so far being achieved.
4.	Increased cost of airfare travel and home quarantine costs on return
5.	Prohibitive travel insurance (individual or corporate)
6.	Personal health concerns
7.	Vaccine passport inconsistencies

It is also highly likely that other regions will have similarly severely reduced attendance. Further, these same reasons are likely, given the unpredictable nature of COVID-19, to continue to impact upon APAC members' attendance in March 2022 at ICANN73, which is also scheduled to take place in the North America region.

We are concerned that holding a hybrid meeting in which participants from only some regions can participate in-person is not in line with ICANN's goal to reflect regional and cultural diversity, and risks further disenfranchising regions that are already under-represented within ICANN's processes.

While we appreciate the virtual meeting format and the Zoom platform may be further enhanced to improve the virtual experience, the benefits of face to face interactions (as outlined above) cannot be replicated by virtual attendance.

The APAC Space therefore respectfully requests that the Board take into consideration the ability of ICANN community members from all regions to attend face-to-face ICANN meetings in person to equitably reap the benefits of such engagement. Should the Board decide to proceed with a hybrid meeting for ICANN72, we ask that it explain how proceeding with limited global participation contributes to the global public interest.

To the extent that any part of ICANN72 takes place in-person, we ask that the Board consider limiting this to a pilot of a particular group or community effort (for example, the Board, NomCom or a particular Working Group or SO/AC) whose work has been tangibly hampered by virtual meetings and who stand to benefit from in-person interaction. Such a pilot at ICANN72 could helpfully inform meeting planning for 2022 while minimizing the disadvantage to the broader ICANN community beyond North America.

Sincerely,

Members of ICANN's APAC Space