ICANN87 Bali | AGM – GAC Discussion on Next Round
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JULIA CHARVOLEN

Welcome to the ICANN87 GAC Discussion on New gTLDs on Tuesday 20 October at 9:00 local time. Please note that this session is being recorded and is governed by the ICANN Expected Standards of Behavior, ICANN Community Participant Code of Conduct and the ICANN Community Anti-Harassment Policy.

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I will now leave the floor over to Marco Hogewoning, GAC Vice-Chair and Topic Lead. Thank you, over to you.

MARCO HOGEWONING

Thank you, Julia. Good morning, colleagues. Before we start our new gTLD session, our Chair-Elect wishes to say something.

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IAN SHELDON

Good morning. Ian Sheldon, current GAC Vice-Chair. First up, I just wanted to thank the Indonesian hosts for a lovely reception last night. And I also wanted to let you all know, unfortunately, our current Chair had to depart ICANN early. He's had to return home to attend to an unfortunate family matter. It is with great regret that he's had to do so. And we're currently working on farewell arrangements. And we'll return to the Committee with further advice on what that looks like in the next day or so. So, for now, myself and the other Vice-Chairs will be chairing the remaining of the meetings. With that, I give the floor back to Marco. Thank you.

MARCO HOGEWONING

Thank you, Ian. And our thoughts are with Nico. If I can have the next slide, Gulten or Julia. What are we here for today? Well, another. I was doing the math. It's five and a half hours of new gTLD already. Or this is actually the fifth and a half hour. More new gTLD. We've listened to you. We've picked up. ICANN Org is happy on our invitation to join again and to give us a brief overview of the safeguards that were in place. Ariel Liang will be presenting remotely. After that, we should have plenty of room for discussion that will be run by me and Ken-Ying here, one of my fellow gTLD topic leads.

So before I hand over to ICANN, because Ariel is remote, may I kindly ask you to leave your questions to the point where you're seeking clarification and postpone any discussion or comments to the discussion session. That will probably make it slightly easier

with a remote speaker. Of course, ICANN will stay here for the remainder of the session to pick up on any discussions or questions that you might have.

With that, Ariel, good morning. Good morning for you, I hope. Hope you're ready to go. Welcome.

ARIEL LIANG Thank you very much. This is Ariel Liang. I'm speaking to you from Washington, D.C., so it's evening my time. I just want to check whether my audio comes through okay.

MARCO HOGEWONING You're pretty audible, thank you.

ARIEL LIANG Okay. Wonderful. Thank you very much again for inviting me to this session, and I'm speaking to you because I'm part of the new gTLD program team, and I'm also a topic SME for safe art assessment. So hopefully, my contribution can help refresh the GAC on some background and context for this assessment and help address some of the questions from the members. And next slide, please, Julia. Thank you.

So, this slide is a little bit dense because we tried to squeeze in as much historical information as possible, but you can look at the text later in detail. I just want to provide a quick refresher on its origin. So safeguards were safeguard public interest

commitments, safeguard PICs. They were originated because of the GAC advice in the 2012 rounds.

So in 2013, during the ICANN46 Beijing meeting, the GAC advised the Board that additional safeguards should apply to broad categories of new gTLD strings and make sure these safeguards are also subject to contractual oversight. So the strings that GAC focused on at that time was basically the ones that regarding consumer protection, sensitive strings or invoke a sense of regulated markets, especially the ones that may invoke consumer trust or create heightened risks of consumer harm.

And in fact, in the GAC advice itself, the GAC identified a number of strings across financial health care, charity, children and various factors that may have such a risk. And the safeguards that the GAC identified in its advice is basically some sort of obligation for the registry operator to make sure they verify who is and check for the registrants and have some mechanism to mitigate abusive activities, make sure there is a mechanism to handle complaints and there should be real consequences if certain registry operator violates these obligations.

So these are called the safeguards, and the GAC proposed some suggested languages what those safeguards should look like. And after this advice was issued to the Board, it took some process for the Board to deliberate on the advice and also solicited input from the wide community on the GAC advice. And eventually in 2014, the Board adopted or accepted the GAC advice.

At the same time, proposed implementation framework can operationalize the safeguards assessment. So just to give you a high level overview of what this framework looks like, it's basically the Board translated the GAC advice into 10 safeguard public interest commitments, safeguard picks, and their contractual obligations to be included in the registry agreement specification 11.

And at the same time, the Board created four risk based string groups. So basically if a string falls within one or more of these groups, then the relevant safeguard picks needs to be incorporated into their registry agreement as contractual obligations. So these four string groups are the ones on the slides basically related to regulated sectors with open entry requirement or closed entry requirement means that, you know, the registry operator may need, the string may mean that the sector needs certain kind of qualification or licensing from government to operate. And also there's another type of string is the one that have potential for cyber bullying, harassment. And finally, the fourth group is the ones inherently governmental functions.

And the third component of this framework is to establish a mapping of a specific safeguard picks to each string group. So this is the ones on the slide, you probably got cut off on the screen, but basically if it falls within group one, then safeguard picks 1, 2, 3 will apply and et cetera. And also in the Board's resolution, the Board identified the platform strings that fall within each of the groups. So that's the outcome of the GAC advised deliberation by the

Board's. And basically that serve as the historical precedence for this round of safeguard assessment.

And following that, we go to the New gTLD Subsequent Procedure Policy Development Process in 2021. So basically this SubPro policy codified safeguard assessment into the program. So with its recommendation, the community asked ICANN to make sure the same assessment is conducted for future rounds and make sure we adhere to the exact same framework that was developed and implemented by the Board in the last round.

At the same time, there are additional recommendations and implementation guidance to refine this framework. So, for example, SubPro policy asks ICANN to make sure applicants have an opportunity to self-identify if it falls within one of these risk-based string groups. And also to consider whether we should hire or contract evaluation panel or establish an evaluation panel for this specific assessment. So basically to maintain or continue the safeguard assessment like last round, but with some incremental improvements and changes. So that's the historical background of safeguard assessment. And let's move to the next slide, please.

And here I want to provide also a high-level overview what assessment looks like this round and what remains the same and what is changed. But what is changed is basically to strengthen this assessment to make sure it's clearer, more structured, and more transparent compared to the previous round.

So what remains the same is basically this substantive framework thought carried forward from the 2012 round. There's no substantive changes. That means the 10 safeguard picks remain the same. They still address the same topics like consumer protection, regulated sectors, sensitive use, et cetera. The risk-based groups still remain the same. They're still the four groups from the 2012 round.

The mapping of the safeguard picks to the string groups still remain the same. And finally, if a string is deemed as one of the risk-based groups, then the applicable safeguard picks will continue being incorporated into the registry agreement as contractual obligations. So all of these are the same like the last round.

And what's new this round is that first, as I mentioned earlier, applicants, they have opportunity to self-identify or help provide inputs into the assessment. So they need to answer a set of safeguard assessment questions in the application. But their responses will inform but not determine the classification of their string group. That's the first change. It's because of SubPro policy.

And second change is that ICANN has contracted an independent expert, which is MIRA Group. It's a managing consulting firm based in Washington, D.C. They're expert evaluators. So their job is to help evaluate each applied for string against this safeguard framework and ensure that this assessment is conducted in an independent and consistent manner.

And the third point, this is the part we make sure it's strengthened or clarified, is that the assessment itself will focus on the interpretation of the string meaning based on how a reasonable person around the world would understand the string from linguistic, cultural, formal, informal meaning across various regions and languages and cultures.

So it's to focus on the various level of meaning of the string. So it's the string-focused or meaning-focused assessment. So that's the part we clarified in the AGB. And also in the application-related questions, we made this a focal point as well. So we prompt the applicant to really think through the meaning the string carries. And also this is something that's a guiding principle for the evaluator to focus on as well.

And the fourth point is that the final determination of the string group is not going to be rendered until the relevant community input has been considered. And that's also a separate policy recommendation that directs us to design the assessment this way. And so that the evaluators, they must consider application comments, also community input, including those from the GAC, before they finalize their determination on the string group.

And in terms of the methodology by the evaluators, it's much more structured compared to the previous round, because now we have established criteria to look at. And also when they make their final determinations, they have to be supported by documented rationale. And all of the evaluation has to come through a quality

assurance mechanism. That means they need to go through secondary review, and there will be calibration exercises among the evaluators to make sure the criteria is consistently applied.

And finally, now there's timing and transparency-related enhancement. It means the safeguard assessment is part of the string evaluation stage of the program, which is expected to take about 180 days after the string confirmation day. So the assessment results will be published as part of the string evaluation stage report for the public to see.

So these are some of the new things with this round that's generally enhancement to make this a much more structured process like before.

So with that, I will stop speaking to take some questions and comments. And I also want to quickly mention that the slide deck includes a number of slides in the annex that provide additional links to the AGB, to also other resources that may be helpful for the members to review after the session. So I won't go into detail here, but I'm happy to take questions.

MARCO HOGEWONING Thank you, Ariel, and indeed for those in the room, the GAC members. The slides were sent to you last night via email, and of course they will also be available via the regular ways on the GAC website. Before I quickly scan the room, if there are any clarified questions, I have one for you, Ariel. Where you say GAC input would

in early warning qualify as community input or GAC input into this process?

ARIEL LIANG

Yes, indeed. So GAC early warning, also GAC advice, they're all considered part of the community inputs. And the safeguard assessment panel are required to review all of these inputs, including the ones from the GAC, before they make final determination. Because first of all, it's policy directed requirement. But second, that's very valuable for consideration anyway, because GAC may flag certain things the evaluators may not notice were missed. So that's by design, the evaluators must consider those from the GAC, as well as the wider community.

MARCO HOGEWONING

Thank you. Any other clarifying questions? I do not see hands yet up, so then I suggest we move to the part where it is your turn. With the open mic, if you can advance the slides. Thank you. And please, Ariel, thank you for joining us. And feel free to stay online if there are any other questions coming.

So now, as promised, to wrap this week's discussions around gTLD. Open mic session, maybe just to provide a quick framing and to recoup on what we've learned earlier this week. And I think that's important to keep in mind. What we see now in the application is everything. This is everything that was put in, everything that was implied for, with only the very basic checks. So everything that

Ariel just talked about will be done in the future. And that future starts on 17 November, string confirmation day. Because what you now see, some strings might be replaced, some strings might disappear. There might be other reasons why applications will not put through. So please also remember that what you're currently looking at is a very early draft. Things can change.

The community input, as again, from 17 November to 16 March, you, me, everybody can provide input for the GAC at that stage. Probably the more important mechanism will be the early warnings. As we've just learned, you can submit early warnings also regarding safeguards. My personal recommendation would be, when in doubt, just do that. Better safe than sorry. It's probably good to have it on the record, even though I personally trust that the safeguard mechanisms will automatically be applied and work as designed. In case.

Another good clarification. Even though the public comment period, even though the early warning period is time limited, at any stage in the process, we can, we as GAC, can always discuss issuing consensus advice. There is no time limit on that. Whenever we feel like something is amiss with either an application or with the process, we can, of course, intervene. With that frame, and Ken-Ying will help me here. I open the floor. And first thing, may I invite India to make their intervention. You've been waiting for quite some time now.

SUSHIL PAL

Not that I've been waiting. I'm Sushil from India. Thank you, Marco. We just did some analysis of the strings when this round was revealed, and we found that, you know, to share some concerns which we think not only India, the country, might have, but you know, and it's a concern which most of the other countries might also share.

First, also with regard to the four string, four risk-based string categories, I think the last one, that is the fourth category, wherein the strings are applied, are released to the sovereign functions, .defense, .passport, .national. I mean, we would want to know as to how we want to take it forward.

I mean, from the categorization, I understand that they would not be allowed, but how do we make sure that we do not lose any such string which might relate to the sovereign function? So maybe GAC kind of plans to do some kind of our own consultations internally and, you know, come out with certain strings which we think on which we have a consensus that these relate to the sovereign functions, and should we have a GAC consensus advice on that? That's one.

And the second concern is that this time, unlike last time, we have seen, I mean, many strings which have been applied for the emerging technologies, which relates to .robot, .ai, .gpt, .llm. We understand that the closed genetics are not allowed. That's for sure.

However, we would definitely want to maybe ask ICANN as to what RBCs are actually in place to make sure that the strings to whom these strings are delegated, they're actually performing those functions. For example, a company might presently apply for .llm, while it may not be having large-angle model per se, and since this relates to the significant consumer protection issue as well as DNS abuse issue, these things are important, that those RBCs must be in place, and anyway, those are voluntary.

It's also important that what periodic assessment does ICANN have, given the fact that we are all aware that there is a strong commercial considerations for domain sale and transfers, which is pretty common, I think. I may not say that, but it's pretty common. From the consumer protection aspect as well as DNS abuse aspect, it's important that these obligations on the part of registrar should be clearly, I mean, should be rigorously validated by the ICANN.

These two things are important, keeping in view the fact that the safeguards, as was given by GAC Advice in the BC communique, although we were informed by the ICANN colleague that those safeguards have been translated into the PICs, and PICs is a long document, which is all only voluntary, most of them, I think, and some of them are contractual. How many of them are actually in place, I think that's for us to figure out.

However, what we broadly see, I think there were, the GAC Advice, there were two very important ones, which was who's accuracy and verifications and DNS abuse. From the conversations we've been

having in the various ICANN meetings, we don't think that enough or very concrete action has been taken either with regard to the WHOIS accuracy and verification or with regard to DNS abuse.

So keeping that in mind, I think my request to the GAC Chair and also keeping the fact in mind that till March 16, which is the deadline for the community input, I mean, do we need to kind of meet again, consult again, and should we have a strategy, how do we go about it? That's the request to the GAC Chair and to the other GAC colleagues. Thank you.

MARCO HOGEWONING Thank you, Sushil. Obviously, the GAC Chair isn't here.

SUSHIL PAL You're the chair for me as of now.

MARCO HOGEWONING Okay, thank you. I think in actionable for the GAC, and I might be too, we'll have a bit of time for the wrap-up. My proposed way forward would be to organize an intersessional call a bit of time after string confirmation day. As we sketched out in the early warning, we can group.

We don't have to send individuals where it might be we're just having sort of open hour where people can present their early warnings and find that they have the same issues on their plate and issue a collective warning. That would be my proposed way

forward to that part, and then we can take the list to find a suitable time for everybody or maybe even make it multiple sessions. We have until March to sort this out.

Then you also directed a few questions to ICANN staff, and I believe Ariel has some answers for you as well. Ariel, do you want to come back in?

ARIEL LIANG

Yes, thank you very much for the intervention from India, and please forgive me. I don't remember every single component, but I'd like to address a couple of items that you raised.

First, I think India mentioned that if a string is deemed as one of the high-risk groups, then it's not allowed. So that is the part I would like to clarify because safeguard assessment itself does not stop an application from proceeding. So what it does is to make sure the applicable safeguard picks are incorporated into the strings contract as contractual obligations. If you look at the slide deck, I don't know whether it's easy, Julia, to pull up the slides to the annex. I think it's annex slide six. It's the previous one. Yes, the previous slide. Yes, right here.

These are the contractual obligations for safeguard picks. For example, if a string is deemed an inherently governmental function, then safeguard picks 1 through 8 plus 10 will be incorporated into the registry operator's registry agreement as obligations that must comply. And also, they will be enforced by

ICANN. So that's what safeguard assessment essentially does, is to make sure the applicable obligations are incorporated into the registry operator's contract with ICANN. But it does not stop an application from proceeding. It's a different kind of effect on the application. So I just want to clarify that first point.

And second point, I think India also raised the issue of RBCs with regard to the strings that identified here. So RBC, its name is called Registry Voluntary Commitments. So this is something that the applicant has to propose. It could propose on its own volition, but also it could propose based on to address concerns from third parties, including those from the GAC. And ICANN wouldn't be able to evaluate RBCs unless it was proposed for evaluation. And it's proposed to be incorporated into the registry agreement as contractual obligations.

And as a lot of you may already know that there are limitations regarding whether RBC can be approved by ICANN. And one of the biggest issues that the ICANN community dealt with a couple of years ago is relating to content restriction or content regulation. So ICANN by law basically forbids that type of commitment if it's related to content or forbids incorporation of such commitment into the registry agreement.

So basically the applicant must be able to propose RBCs by complying or adhering to these boundaries. And then ICANN will be able to evaluate those based on the criteria and the framework that we outlined in the AGB. But that will be a completely different

session to talk about RBCs. It's very complicated and dense. So I will stop here. And I see U.K. also has a hand up.

MARCO HOGEWONING

Yes. Thank you, Ariel. And then before I hand it over to the U.K., maybe also to pick up another point you made, Sushil, about GAC advice. As I pointed out, my personal view is this is early stages for GAC advice. And be reminded that we don't need a full ICANN meeting. We can take GAC advice offline.

As somebody just whispered in my ear, for instance, the .passport string is a replacement string. So whether or not that will actually be in play or not, we'll only know after the 17th. So that's why it's not that we're saying no, but as leadership we're trying to slow this down until we have a confirmed list. But with that, U.K., Mr. Blaker, you have the floor.

PAUL BLAKER

Thanks, Marco. It's Paul Blaker for the record. First, I just wanted to say a huge thanks to Ariel and her colleagues for the slides and for the presentation at such short notice. It's really valuable and very helpful. So thank you. We've all seen there are many applications which cover government functions or regulated sectors, such as medicine, finance, education or fundraising, and they will require proper safeguards. So the safeguard assessment will be a critically important process.

We understand that community input on the applications will be taken into account in the assessment. But it would be helpful to have reassurance that the assessment will not be dependent on community input, so that even if there is no comment, the assessment will still be done in a comprehensive, prudent and responsible way.

For now, I think you're right, Marco, I think we need to let the agreed process go forward. But of course, governments will want to review the outcome of the safeguard assessments very carefully when they are released. But for now, again, just to say thank you very much for a really helpful presentation.

MARCO HOGEWONING Thank you, U.K. Marika, do you want to respond or Ariel?

MARIKA KONINGS Yeah, thanks, maybe just to confirm your assumption that even if there are no comments or input provided, the safeguard assessment does take place for all strings.

MARCO HOGEWONING Thank you. Next in my queue is Switzerland, Jorge.

JORGE CANCIO Thank you. Jorge Cancio, Switzerland, for the record. Good morning, everyone. So I just wanted to add on what Paul and others have said. And also thank Ariel and ICANN staff for the

explanations regarding the voluntary registry commitments, I forget the acronym, I always think about PICS, but the public interest commitments, which was the old name.

Just wanted to add on what Ariel mentioned, that they are not supposed to regulate content. That was a very long discussion, so it has a lot of details, and so I urge colleagues to look into the nuances of that discussion. I guess that is all available somewhere online, and otherwise maybe our support staff, together with the team from Marika, could prepare a memo or something similar, so that we know the rules of the game. Because, of course, it's a bit of a grey area, what is content regulation and what is not.

And, for instance, I can think about RVCs, about public interest commitments, that don't get into the content itself, but consider the eligibility. This is something that we discussed a lot during the last round and the implementation of the last round. So not that much entering into the content of the websites or what is under a domain name, for instance in a regulated profession or a very specific public interest sector, but really making sure that those applying and registering for domain names under that top-level domain are really legitimate registrants of that kind of domain name that's under the category of eligibility.

So I just wanted to share this, because maybe this is something that is absolutely logical for those of us who have been around too long, but for newer colleagues, it's something that may ring a bell. Thank you.

KEN-YING TSENG We saw a hand from India. Do you want to speak for the second time, or you dropped your hand already?

SUSHIL PAL I have a small question to the Ariel, I think, with regard to the BICs in the registrar's accreditation agreement. The way it works is it says that a registry operator will include a provision in the registry registrar agreement that requires the registrar to comply to the relevant applicable laws and regulations. Of which country? I understand this would be the country where the registrant is located. Is that right? Or where the registrar is located, because that aspect is not clear.

The reason I'm asking this question is because the crime gets committed or the abuse gets happening in a country that might be in a third country, where neither the registry is present, nor the registrar is present, nor the registrant is present. So how does this BIC give comfort to the government that there is no DNS abuse, there is no public harm, or there is no violation of consumer rights?

KEN-YING TSENG My reading of the contract, it should be all applicable laws, but ICANN accept to clarify.

ARIEL LIANG

This is Ariel. So this is a very good question raised by India. I will take this back with our legal colleagues. I cannot personally answer this question without consulting the experts on legal matters. But we will get back to the deck on how exactly this provision is interpreted and applied, so that we can provide an accurate, comprehensive answer following the session.

MARCO HOGEWONING

Thank you.

KEN-YING TSENG

Thank you, Ariel. Thank you, India. The next one would be China, please.

GUO FENG

Thank you, Ken-Ying. Guo Feng from China, for the record. Actually, I have a clarifying question for the ICANN team, maybe for Ariel. So I'm not sure if I understand correctly. It seems to me that this round's safeguard assessment specifies that evaluators will judge strings based on how a reasonable person across regions, languages, and cultures globally would interpret their meaning.

So we observed that many applied strings carry multiple meanings, particularly in Chinese linguistic context. Yet I do not know whether the independent evaluation panel has full or limited experts on Chinese language and local cultural background. So could ICANN clarify that. What mechanism will be put in place to ensure that community comments from Chinese-speaking

communities are fully considered when assessing such multi-meaning strings, so that semantic risks under Chinese culture context can be properly identified, documented, and factored into evaluators' determinations? Thank you very much.

KEN-YING TSENG So perhaps Ariel can address this question.

ARIEL LIANG Yes, thank you very much for the question from China. And the language-related aspect is a key aspect when we discuss with the evaluation panel because we understand how important it is for the string to be perceived not just by English speakers, but also end-users around the world. So that's a key consideration, and they're fully aware that they need to be prepared to assess strings based on language, not just their native languages.

And the evaluation panel mirror group, we actually published an announcement about their qualifications. Perhaps I can put the link in the chat after my comment here, and you can check their composition of the panel. It's a very diverse panel by design, and they're all expert researchers with a very comprehensive background on research, various fields, and also they have proposed a hierarchy of resources and evidence and methodology they will utilize for assessing strings, including checking how a string is perceived in other languages and how to assess an IDN

string based on the translation and other things. So they have proposed that structured framework to make the assessment.

At the same time, in their evaluation design, they have proposed if they do not have the in-house expertise to assess a certain string, they will consult with external experts. They have a mechanism to do that as well, and that's incorporated into their proposal of work to ICANN. And we are in the process of finalizing the evaluation guides for a safeguard assessment, and our goal is to make it public in the short and near future, so that the public will be able to see how exactly an evaluation is conducted, how the criteria is interpreted, what's the workflow, what's the decision framework, and all other pertinent elements.

So hopefully, once this documentation is made public, that will address a lot of the questions from the GAC as well as the wider community on how the assessment is done in the consistent, accurate, and comprehensive manner. So hopefully that will help address some of the questions.

MARCO HOGEWONING Thank you, Ariel. Actually, Jared has already pointed to the link in the chat. Maybe in response to what you just said, would it help if the GAC, either as a whole or individual GAC members, would make themselves available to your panel in case they need external advice on culture or language? I think on behalf of the GAC, without checking every member, I think we would be willing to do that. So I mean, the offer stands, alongside, of course, the official consensus

advice. I think we collectively are happy to help ICANN in this endeavor, so if you have any questions, please do reach out.

Do we have anybody else? My queue is empty now, unless China, you want to say something again? I see your hand is still up.

GUO FENG Sorry, it's an old hand.

MARCO HOGEWONING In which case, anybody else? Now is your chance. We still have approximately 10 minutes. Sorry, Chukwuma, WBU.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER Yes, thank you for the floor. We said the previous day that this was the moment to reiterate some of the questions, so I'll reiterate one of the questions that I raised during the first day discussion. I think that it is a mistake that in the AGB we didn't notice that there is no obligation to provide the supporting documents, but for GeoTLD and community, I think that it is important to know who is supporting the application.

At the moment, this is not available in the documentation, so it's important before we make our mind to know if each of this community or GeoTLD has benefited the support of the relevant interlocutor or not. So I don't know if the fact that it is not mandatory in the AGB prevents us to ask this documentation, because in that case I would ask.

MARCO HOGEWONING Marika?

MARIKA KONINGS Yes, thanks for that comment. Just to confirm, it is mandatory for the applicant to provide, it's just not something that is published because it's not part of the public portions of the application. Having said that, in 2012 I think there were many applicants that sent those letters to our correspondence team, so they would be publicly visible. So if there are applicants that would like to share that publicly, that is an avenue available, and obviously the GAC also has a channel through early warning to specifically ask an applicant to make that information available.

So there are avenues to ask for that. Obviously an applicant may choose not to, but I think an applicant may also then be aware of the potential consequences of not having that information available to relevant authorities, and this may of course also feed into the evaluation.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER So if not voluntary made, we have to go to early warning? Only just to know who is behind the application?

MARCO HOGEWONING I believe who is behind the application is visible. What is not visible is who is sponsoring it, in case you ask for Francis de Capetonne.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER For a GeoTLD and the community, for me it's more important the relevant subject, not who made the application. If somebody applied for .amsterdam, you want to be sure that there is the Amsterdam municipality involved, or the state of the Netherlands, no?

MARCO HOGEWONING Well, I hear you, but for the sake of time, may I suggest we take this offline and see if there is a possible pathway forward on this, for a more generic solution? Would that be an idea? Because my queue right now is out of Switzerland and India on the queue, and I've got 13 minutes left. So happy to entertain this discussion, unless there is an immediate response.

MARIKA KONINGS No, as I said, I think I outlined the paths that are available. If there is anything further to be changed, it would require changes to the applicant guidebook, and going through that process as well.

JARED ERWIN Sorry, Marco, if I may, this is Jared. Sorry, over here. I was just going to add on to that. We have the geo-evaluation panel, so they are tasked with reviewing letters of support that the applicant is required to submit with their application. Showing that they have the support of the relevant government authority, and there is a panel assigned to review those letters for authenticity and

accuracy, and that it's the appropriate authority providing that support for that particular application. And the results of that evaluation will also be made public as part of the application evaluation portion of the program. So I just wanted to note that as well.

MARCO HOGEWONING Thank you, Jared. So, my queue is still Switzerland and India. Switzerland, Jorge, your turn.

JORGE CANCIO Thank you, Marco. Jorge Cancio, Switzerland, for the record. I just wanted to underscore how important knowing whether there is a non-objection letter or a support letter in the case of a GeoTLD is. And I obviously appreciate that there is a panel looking into the GeoTLD evaluation, and we will of course look forward to the results of that evaluation. But obviously, if we see a GeoTLD as an application, and it affects one of our city names or geographic names, we will want to know whether that application has a non-objection or support letter from the appropriate public authority.

And I completely understand the point made by Giacomo, that it is a little bit awkward that this is not part of the public information. So I don't know whether there is a way around the provisions of the AGB, but obviously I guess it would be good to express the expectation that that information, which is very important to

formulate an early warning, if need be, is readily available. Thank you.

MARCO HOGEWONING Thank you, Jorge. India, Santhosh.

T. SANTHOSH Thank you, Marco. And as mentioned in the presentation that there is a safeguard assessment panel, which came during August 2026. But I would like to know whether there is a string similarity evaluation panel and the geographical names panel, which Jorge has just mentioned. And also a reserved name panel, which ICANN will constitute shortly.

And additionally, could ICANN clarify how the independence, expertise and accountability of this all-evaluation panel, which will be coming in the place, will ensure particularly when assessing sensitive or regulated strings with implication for public policy. Thank you.

MARCO HOGEWONING Thank you, India. ICANN? Jared?

JARED ERWIN Jared? Yes, thank you, Marco. Hi, this is Jared Erwin, for the record. I'm about to put in the chat a link to our sourcing page, which includes all the different panels and vendors that we have for the program and the status of any RFPs, requests for proposals, the

process we use to identify vendors and panels. I'll put that information in the link.

You asked about geo and reserve names. We do have a panel selected for that one, and a link to that announcement will be in the link I'll put in the chat shortly, where you can find more information about that panel. The other one you asked about, I believe, was string similarity. That one, as you'll see on the page, is still in progress. The RFP is still in progress. And we also have timeline information on that page, so you have an idea of when we expect to have an announcement or contract with that particular vendor. So I hope that helps. Thank you.

MARIKA KONINGS

And if I can maybe add, in the RFPs, you can also see the requirements that are put in place in relation to expertise, independence, expectations. And I think Ariel already alluded to, and we've already done that in a number of areas, the evaluation guides, where we also set out what were the criteria that were established by the community and are outlined in the applicant guidebook that the evaluation will take place, on the basis of which the evaluation will take place.

So there's a lot of information on the panels, their roles, how they operate, already publicly available as well. And as I said, there's still some underdevelopment that will come in due time as well.

MARCO HOGEWONING

Okay. Thank you again. Any final comments, any final thoughts? My queue is empty. Otherwise, my suggestion is we start wrapping this up for now. My readout, again, there's still a lot to come. I can ask the safeguards in place. Ideally, there should be a mechanism to get easy access to the supporting parties for any geos. As per WBU request, anything you've got taken away from this? Any further thoughts, comments, readouts?

KEN-YING TSENG

From the questions that we heard today, I believe the GAC members are focusing on a few areas. The first is whether any of the streams fall under the four categories that we just reviewed this morning. And those are in relation to public interest, very important to each of our GAC members. So we should continue to watch, going forward, how the safeguard assessment system and the procedure will be carried out.

And the second thing is about geographical names. I believe that each of the countries are concerned about our own geographical names. And I heard that there's one requirement that applicants need to submit a supporting document from the relevant government, along with their application.

I think that's something that is on our mind, that when the applicant submits such an application, they will consider whether they will be abducted by a certain government or country. So again, I think the process is going on. We can see how the

procedure is going forward, and the GAC members can consider whether we want to take any further action.

MARCO HOGEWONING

Thank you. In terms of next steps, as I mentioned, India will, I guess, as leadership, as topic leads, we will work with the Secretariat to find at least, I guess, two moments somewhere in the timeframe, November, March, to probably, I guess, early on in the November period, at least for the GAC to indicate their thoughts on particular strings.

We might even see if we can have an easier mechanism to at least indicate that you have something, and then we'll go over them, and then probably one or two meetings to see if people can consolidate early warnings to some of this. I think that's a useful way forward also to lighten ICANN's workload, instead of sending 100 individual ones that you're nodding.

Anything else? There is, of course, later today, a first communiqué drafting. May I invite, if you have any thoughts on that, reach out to us, the New gTLD topic leads. We will be coordinating, or I'm happy to volunteer us as a group to coordinate any contributions to the communiqué text, so please reach out if you have any thoughts on that. Is there anything else? I forget. Ian? Staff? Otherwise, can you, ICANN? Otherwise, we go to coffee three minutes early. You know what, you have the agenda. What's next up, Ian?

IAN SHELDON Thank you. Please be back in the room at 10:30 for our discussion on DNS abuse. Thanks all. Enjoy your coffee.

MARCO HOGEWONING And thank you, Ariel. Have a nice evening.

ARIEL LIANG Thank you for having me.

[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]