ICANN to be free from US control

SAN FRANCISCO, USA: The head of the agency entrusted to essentially run the internet said that the group is on course to break free of US oversight late next year.

ICANNs Fade Chehade says that plans are going ahead to remove control of the internet domain names from the US Department of Commerce and involve a global group of 'stakeholders'. Image: Internet Governance

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 non-profit organisation's meeting 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 towards 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 this year announced that it is open to not renewing its contract with ICANN that expires in about 11 months time, 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 to the US Department of Commerce next year.

Internet oversight can't be state controlled

"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 that the contract is not reviewed past 2015."

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

As the US steps back from overseeing ICANN, states and corporations are grappling to take the reins. ICANN has gone from being behind the scenes tending to the task of managing website addresses to being centre stage in a play for power on the internet.

ICANNs headquarters at Marina Del Rey, which is home to the University of Southern California's Information Sciences Institute. Image: Wikipedia

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

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

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

Governance of the internet will be a high-profile topic at the ICANN 51 meeting in Los Angeles. 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 particularly 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," he said.

Source: AFP via I-Net Bridge

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