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MEDIA CONTACTS: Brad White – Director of Global Media Affairs
Washington, DC USA
Ph: +1 310.301.3884
brad.white@icann.org

Michele Jourdan – Communications Department
Los Angeles, CA USA
Ph. +1 310.301.5831
michele.jourdan@icann.org

First Non-Latin Domain Names Go Online

Arabic language can now be used in an entire Internet address name

Washington, DC... May 6, 2010... For the first time in the Internet's history, non-Latin characters can now be used for an entire Internet address name. The first "internationalized" domain names (IDNs) were entered into the Internet's root zone yesterday, marking an historic first in ICANN's globalization of the Internet.

Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are the first three countries to use Arabic characters in the last portion of their Internet domain names – that portion to the right of the dot (or to the left for languages like Arabic which written and read from right-to-left), such as dot-eg (Egypt), dot-sa (Saudi Arabia) or dot-ae (United Arab Emirates). They are called country code top-level domains or ccTLDs.

"This isn't just a minor change for the Internet, it's a seismic shift that will forever change the online landscape," said Rod Beckstrom, President and Chief Executive Officer of ICANN. "This is the beginning of a transition that will make the Internet more accessible and user friendly to millions around the globe, regardless of where they live or what language they speak."

As more web sites in the three countries take advantage of the new Arabic top-level domains, Internet users will no longer have to switch to Latin characters when entering the last part of a domain name. They will have a choice of entering the Arabic characters...

Egypt: .eg or .مصر

Saudi Arabia: .sa or .ةيدوعسلا

United Arab Emirates: .ae or .تارام

Historically, technical constraints meant that all domain names had to end in letters from the Latin alphabet (A through Z). After years of work and technical testing by ICANN, a global system for the use of other scripts in domain names was opened up in November, when ICANN began accepting applications for IDNs last fall.

“The introduction of IDNs has been very complex from both a technical and policy level,” said Tina Dam, Senior Director of IDNs. “With this milestone, we are looking forward to seeing how the Arabic IDN ccTLDs will be adopted by the users.”

Arabic is among the most highly used languages on the Internet today. The Middle-East has an average Internet penetration of just over 20%, and shows a big potential for growth.

Since the IDN program is being rolled out in stages, it will initially only be used on a limited basis for individual country domain names. But eventually IDNs will be broadly used in the top level domain portion of Internet address names.

To date, 21 countries or territories have applied for IDN country code top level domains, representing 11 different languages.

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To see which countries have applied for ccTLD IDNs go here: <http://www.icann.org/en/topics/idn/fast-track/string-evaluation-completion-en.htm>.

To read about IDNs in general go here: <http://www.icann.org/en/topics/idn/>.

About ICANN:

To reach another person on the Internet you have to type an address into your computer - a name or a number. That address has to be unique so computers know where to find each other. ICANN coordinates these unique identifiers across the world. Without that coordination we wouldn't have one global Internet. ICANN was formed in 1998. It is a not-for-profit public-benefit corporation with participants from all over the world dedicated to keeping the Internet secure, stable and interoperable. It promotes competition and develops policy on the Internet's unique identifiers. ICANN doesn't control content on the Internet. It cannot stop spam and it doesn't deal with access to the Internet. But through its coordination role of the Internet's naming system, it does have an important impact on the expansion and evolution of the Internet. **For more information please visit:** www.icann.org.