



Q2 Internet Society African Community Call: Protect the Internet! 7 July 2022

Victor Ndonnang

Good morning, good afternoon and good evening. Wherever you are joining us from so thank you again to all of you to join us today for this quarterly community call. Today call is a it is a very special one is we are welcoming all our individual needs in the African region.

[VIDEO PLAYS]

Victor Ndonnang

Thank you very much again, thank you for joining us today. We are very pleased to have you all. So, we have a very packed agenda today. So, before I hand off to our Vice President for Community Engagement for the introductory remarks, I would just like to take a moment to really welcome all the new individual members, some of you are joining the committee call for the first time. So, this q2 We were very happy to welcome 2289 new members to the Internet Society from the Africa region mentioned that so again, welcome to those of you who are new member who are joining the community call for the first time. So, on that I will hand over to choice for the introductory remarks.

Joyce Dogniez

Thank you, Victor. So, it's always a pleasure to be here on the call with all of you. As you know, the African region is very close to my heart, all of the regions, of course, but you have a special place in my heart as I see the many things that are happening in Africa. Now, the reason why we are here today is also because we believe in a world where the Internet means opportunity. And we care about its future. So, in 2019, in collaboration with the Board of Trustees, staff and global community, the Internet Society developed a five year strategy that focuses on our strategic goal to support an open, globally connected, secure and trustworthy Internet for everyone. The strategy, the past 2025, if you want is centered around three pillars, so it's built, promote and defend. You may have seen this in the introduction video as well.

Now to help grow the Internet, we work to close the digital divide. We bring together the people and technology needed to give everyone the access that they need. In an increasingly connected world, the Internet has become a critical resource, providing those with access virtually infinite opportunities to innovate and to work together for the collective good. And this did not happen by accident. The Internet owes its strength, its resilience and success to its open architecture was built to be built upon, my son would smile at that and probably think of Lego but we are talking about the Internet today.

Now to make the Internet stronger, we advocate for a secure, trustworthy and more resilient Internet. And we defend the Internet from those who could make it less secure, less resilient and less open.

And as we approach the midpoint of our five year strategy, we've gathered information about the progress that we've made so far. So, that's what I would like to share with you at a high level today, I will highlight some of the achievements but I really invite you to go online and to read the full report as it outlines the progress that we have made together the community because without you, this would have not happened. So, you were and you are instrumental in the progress that we made. If we look at the Build -- under build, we committed to build an extent connectivity to 50 communities by 2025. And in 2020 and 21, we built an extended connectivity to communities in 49 countries in total, through building or strengthening community networks. As many of you know, 10 of the countries were actually in Africa. And we did that as well through building or strengthening ISPs, Internet exchange points and 12 of those were in Africa.

Under Promote we have three main objectives. So, in the first one, we set ourselves the goal to ensure that by 2025 If the Internet model of networking will be dominant, and for this we track four areas, which collectively provide a view of whether the Internet model of networking is

preferred. And these areas are autonomy of networks, they are shared network reachability, free flow of data and freedom to deploy. The second objective is that by 2025, leading governments of the world will have adopted policies that favor the intranet model and improve Internet connectivity. And in 2020, and 2021, a total of six leading governments with which the Internet Society engaged have adopted policies that favor that Internet model and improve the Internet connectivity. And in Africa, I'm very happy to say that those countries were Kenya and Zimbabwe.

The third objective is that by 2025, security technologies promoted by Internet Society will have provided resiliency, stability, availability, confidentiality and integrity for networks that want to interconnect. Now, I'm gonna go a little bit technical here and use a couple of acronyms, but I'll try to explain them or at least give you the full wording here. So, the technologies we track for this our Internet protocol version six are better known as ipv6 Transport Layer Security TLS, Domain Name System Security extension for those who know DNSSEC, route origin authorizations ROA, and route origin validation, or called ROV as well. We like acronyms. Right?

Moving on to Defend. We also have three main objectives. The first one is that by 2025, leading governments of the world have adopted policies that favor the growth of independent networks, which are free to interconnect and 2020 and 2021, a total of 18 leading governments in countries with which the Internet Society engaged adopted policies in favor of the growth of independent networks, which are free to interconnect.

The second objective is that by 2025, we counter attempts by at least three leading governments to undermine encryption. And in 2020, and 2021, we countered attempts to undermine encryption by a total of five leading governments. So, we've exceeded our initial target already. And here we have seen actually, in African context, we have seen the successful advocacy efforts specifically in Mauritius. And last but not least, as I know, this is close to many of you, we want to defend the intranet against shutdowns by increasing cross border connectivity and resiliency. And as I mentioned, in the build objective, we have increased resiliency by building and extending connectivity to communities in a total of 49 countries. And furthering in 2021, we also began to track resiliency, capturing baseline metrics related to infrastructure performance, security, and market readiness in Africa, with plans to expand the tracking to all regions globally. And so for this, I really invite you to look at the Internet resilience index, where we have started tracking resilience in Africa. As you can see, we've made positive progress towards our 2025 goal. And none of this would have been possible without all of you, our chapters and members play really a critical role in moving towards our vision of the Internet being for everyone. But we're not done. So, the need for an open globally connected Internet has been amplified during the pandemic, the threats to the Internet are actually we see that they are increasing. And therefore it's really very

important and even more important that we all unite. And we advocate for to mobilize for the Internet that we all believe in. And lastly, I just want to say thank you, thank you for your continued engagement, for your time for your efforts. We really cannot do this alone and you our community, you really play a critical role in helping us achieve an Internet for everyone.

So, thank you very much. Back to you, Victor.

Victor Ndonnang

Thank you very much, Joyce. So, without further ado, as you read on the invitation, this community call's main focus is all mobilizing working together to protect the Internet, to protect the Internet against today's threats and future trends as well. So, on that I would like to invite my colleagues, Natalie and Verengai. So, first starting with Natalie, she will talk about the issue of splinternet and how it may affect the Internet that we all want in open globally connected, secure and trustworthy Internet. So, Natalie, you have the floor.

Natalie Campbell

Thank you so much, Victor. Hi everybody. I'm so glad to see so many folks here. My name is Natalie Campbell. I'm director of community organizing and public advocacy at the Internet Society. I'm really glad to see so many people here because if there was ever a time to protect the Internet, it is now the Internet Society has seen a lot of concerning trends lately, that could lead to a future that we don't want a dystopian future that can disrupt all of our efforts to grow the open, globally connected, Internet and the benefits that it provides to everyone worldwide.

Today, I'm going to talk about what is the splinternet? How could this impact everyone? What are some paths that could lead to a splinternet? And what you can do to help stop it? But first, to understand what is a splinternet, we need to understand what is the Internet, the Internet is made up of a foundation of critical properties that altogether form the Internet wave networking, I like to think of this as the business model for the Internet is what separates the Internet from being another type of network like an intranet. Every network that wants to participate in the Internet must whether they know or they're not aligned with the Internet way of networking, because this is a simple foundation that enables us to be globally connected and collaborate easily across borders. So, with that in mind, what is the splinternet? While it's pretty easy to splinternet as the opposite of the Internet, at the Internet Society, we have a mission to make sure that the Internet is for everyone. So, in that sense, the splinternet really is our worst case scenario, is the idea that the open globally connected, secure and trustworthy Internet that we all use splinters into a collection of isolated networks that are controlled by governments or corporations.

So, why are we worried about this right now? And why more than ever? That's a really good question. Today, governments, businesses and organizations are increasingly making decisions that could undermine the way the Internet works. So, the Internet wave networking, and they might not even know it. For instance, one particular concern we had this year was when Russia's invasion of Ukraine started. And I have to say my apologies to anyone who was touched by this, this is really awful war, and my sympathies to anyone who might have sensitivities there. From an Internet perspective, there was also some concerning impact. When many countries started rallying to support Ukraine, we got really worried when different countries and influential Internet experts started proposing to disconnect networks in Russia from the Internet. And furthermore, we got concerned when we started to see that sanctions were having an impact of disconnecting Russian networks from the Internet.

So, you might ask yourself, I'm nowhere close to that, why does this impact me? How could this impact my use of the Internet? The issue is, is that if we start making political decisions about who can access the Internet, this could set a very dangerous precedent. Any action that undermines the a political nature of the Internet could instigate other geopolitical attempts to disconnect networks in other parts of the world. So, while you know, the target may have been trying to disconnect networks and Russia a few months back, if that were to happen, that could quickly shift in the target could be any other country in the world. And this would eventually lead to a splinternet. And splinternet is something that would impact everyone in a world in very different ways, which is a big concern.

So, there might be many geographical borders between us. I'm based in Canada, my colleague Dawit, for instance, is based in Ethiopia. Lia is based in Geneva. But the Internet has no borders. This is why it's so easy for us to be here today. And to talk about this really important issue. The reason a splinternet would impact everyone is that it would complicate our ability to connect with one another by fragmenting the Internet into separate networks that don't work so easily. So, in a splinternet, I might not be able to have a zoom conversation with my colleague, Verengai, for instance, so easily, or I might not be able to work on a shared document in a network in another country, for instance, with my colleague Lia without having to pay some kind of a toll fee. That's why actions that could harm one part of the Internet, whether it's networks in Russia or anywhere else in the world could actually harm it for everyone. And if we don't protect the Internet now, this will eventually result in a splinternet.

So, what are some of the causes that could lead to splinternet? I've mentioned one before, but I'm going to expand into three different paths that we're concerned about lately. So, there are many, many different paths that could lead to splinternet. And a splinternet can take different forms

depending what paths we're heading down in that direction. Three paths that we've noticed as of late that are somewhat trends of particular concern are as follows. So, first Internet shutdowns. Obviously, when a government tries to disconnect networks from within its own borders, from the global Internet, it has serious consequences for citizens. And the more governments try to give themselves this power, the more it drives a wedge between those networks in that region and the Internet. This is something if it gains popularity, it leads us towards the splinternet. Secondly, as we saw with the case of the war in Ukraine, politicized to say decisions about Internet access and infrastructure undermines a political nature of the Internet. So, when governments and businesses make politically motivated decisions that could disconnect networks and other countries, from the Internet infrastructure, this could lead us towards the splinternet, because it could cause precedent that could be replicated in virtually any other part of the world.

And finally, third, broader category of threats that could lead towards the splinternet is when policies and business decisions don't protect the Internet. And when I say don't protect the Internet, I specifically mean they don't protect the Internet way of networking, the internet's business model, it might not be a single decision that causes a global splinternet. But just like, every raindrop contributes to a flood, every time a government decision or business decision chooses not to protect the Internet way of networking. This contributes to the path towards the splinternet that could lead to our that worst case scenario.

So, why does this matter? As I mentioned before, the Internet is simple, and it makes our online experiences seamless. You don't have to negotiate with gatekeepers before sending an email, or shopping online. If you're among those who are lucky to have fast, affordable or reliable Internet access, we can just simply go online and do it. Regardless of where we're trying to access online, is splinternet makes things way more complicated, it would literally shattered decade's worth of global connectivity efforts, which were not easy to achieve. And the many networks that make up the Internet today would no longer work together so easily. And this could alter our daily experiences online, and restrict access to who can contribute to this global resource. This ultimately -- while it would affect our daily experiences online, whether it's trying to send an email, potentially web browsing using social media -- this has a knock on effect that would significantly impact things like trade, national economies, innovation, the free flow of information, even international humanitarian efforts, and much, much more.

So, how can we stop the splinternet? So, what I'm going to share with you now is the Internet Society playbook Joyce had mentioned earlier about some of the initiatives that we are doing to protect and defend the global Internet. But we have our own playbook about how we approach this from an advocacy perspective. And there is an opportunity for you as a member to join us in

these efforts. Because as Joyce mentioned, we are stronger together, we need you we need members in our community to expand our reach, and to expand our impact.

So, what is our playbook, the fast model of advocacy, essentially, our approach to advocacy can be broken down into four steps. We flag issues that can either threaten or opportunities to protect the Internet. We analyze these issues and understand how could these potential threats impact what the Internet needs to exist and thrive and by what the Internet needs to exist, I'm again referring to the Internet way of networking, because it's really important to understand how something could undermine the internet's business model to be able to communicate that with the decision makers so that they understand how that could impact the global Internet.

Third, is forming a strategy once we understand how an issue can impact the Internet, and we decide to take it on as part of an advocacy goal. We form a goal on how to mitigate this threat or how to support this opportunity to protect the Internet. And we form a strategy on how to achieve that goal. And finally, again, we are stronger together and so we're always thinking about how can we work together among our community with our community to expand our reach, extend our impact so that we can all of us together, cover more ground and protect the Internet worldwide. So, there are opportunities for community to get involved in every one of these steps. We use this playbook of the Internet Society.

But it is critical for us to work alongside our community in this playbook because we are stronger together. So, whether with flag for instance, anyone is welcome to to flag an issue that could impact the Internet. And a lot of our community members are increasingly starting to do this. If you spot a regional decision in your community that you think might have an impact on the Internet, you're always welcome to let us know. And we're happy to advise on what this potential impact could be and how you might want to pursue this and an advocacy opportunity regionally. Likewise, you can help us in analysis, we have a number of chapters that we're working with that have flagged issues and that are using our Internet Impact Assessment toolkit to analyze how these issues could impact the Internet. And as forms are really good basis for their own regional advocacy efforts, in knowing exactly how to educate decision makers on what it takes to protect the Internet. In that instance, there are members any member can either join into our existing strategy or advocacy efforts, which we have many there, protect the Internet, or if you flagged an issue, you're welcome to form your own strategy on how to mitigate a potential threat or on how to make use of an opportunity to support and protect with the Internet needs to exist in your region.

And finally, then this is the easiest one to get involved is mobilizing community amplifier impact whether that's amplifying our existing campaigns to broaden awareness about the splinternet. Or to bring this to a regional level and talk about specific issues. There are infinite opportunities for you to get involved into amplify our campaigns and our impact article, amplify your own campaigns on regional issues. So, this is a high level glimpse of what is a splinternet. Why it matters to everyone worldwide, why we all need to work together to protect the Internet and a view of our playbook and how you can get involved. I'm really happy to see here today and to see your interest in getting involved because it will take all of us to stop the splinternet and to make sure that we're headed towards a path that promotes and champions an open globally connected, secure and trustworthy Internet for all.

Thank you so much, everyone.

Victor Ndonnang

Thank you very much Natalie. Most of you now can understand why we are talking about protecting the Internet because of the growing issue of splinternet. But there is another issue that is digital sovereignty and the way people understand it or can approach it can also lead to de splinternet. And on that I would like to invite my colleague, Verengai, to talk a little bit more about digital sovereignty. So, Verengai, you have the floor.

Verengai Mabika

Thank you, Victor. And let me introduce myself. Greetings again, my colleagues, friends and comrades, I see quite a lot of familiar names and lots of friends. So, it's a pleasure again, to connect with you. And again, you having these discussions quite important in the growth of the Internet and protecting the Internet. So, it's quite a pleasure to connect with you once again. My name once again is Verengai Mabika. I'm Senior Policy Advisor for Africa, and connecting from Zimbabwe.

Today I will briefly talk about another phenomenon that we are following very closely. That is the potential to further issues that my colleague Natalie mentioned, splinternet. Just to recap, I think Natalie mentioned that increasingly we are seeing local governments, quite a number of governments, sometimes businesses, as well as organizations across the world, making decisions that could undermine the way the Internet works today. In the end, I think this is quite important for our community for us to keep our eyes wide open and a look for all those things that happen across the world so that we can continue to protect the Internet way of networking.

So, this year, we started the research oriented a project called the Digital Sovereignty. And I'd also like to invite colleagues here to follow this project closely and possibly contribute your thoughts. Because we believe that there could be aspects that could lead to the splinternet in the name of digital sovereignty, I think many of you might have hidden things or you know, certain discussions, action being taken by governments in the name of digital sovereignty.

So, we are seeing this quite a lot, especially in our region in Africa, we see quite a lot of political statements for more ministers, sometimes from our governments, that they really want to make policies that protect, or at least that pursue the idea of digital sovereignty. And this idea, actually, we have also been following it quite closely. I think in China, in the last decade or so or two decades, we've been following also, you know, discussions around cyber sovereignty manifesting in what they're calling up the Great Firewall, I think some of you probably have been following this, and some policies and measures that are trying to promote this. In recent years. Also, in other regions in Europe, or in Africa, we are also seeing in regional strategies that are coming up for for region in Africa.

Quite recently, in fact, two years ago, the African Union came with the digital transformation strategy, which is a 10 year plan from 2020 to 2030. And there is also mention of digital sovereignty in this strategy quite explicitly. So, we are seeing a growing interest in discussing these issues or discussing this particular concept, which we think we may need as a community to follow very closely. So, sometimes you may see that digital sovereignty may manifest itself in policies as efforts to do or to improve at the local level. Sometimes, data localization, for example, could be some of those policies that come in the spirit of digital sovereignty. In other places, it may be infrastructure sharing. In other places, it may also be improving competition, especially for local firms.

So, we really want to put our minds together and evaluate these kind of policies and strategies that our governments are bringing in, and to check if they may not have the potential to affect the Internet way of networking, and possibly maybe moving us towards the splinternet that Natalie talked about. So, we are looking very closely to the trends that are happening in the region. And in this research focused projects, we are currently focusing on just three regions, Asia and Pacific, we are also focusing on a Europe is a region and Africa is a region.

So, I would just like to share with you some of our initial things that we're observing in this project. So, firstly, what we are noticing is that digital sovereignty is being defined very differently by different stakeholders. And in our focus in this project, we are going to be focusing on digital sovereignty as it is asserted by the state or by the government. But you you will notice that you

probably come across other names such as check sovereignty, for information sovereignty, Internet sovereignty, cyber sovereignty, those are some of the words that you possibly come across. But like I mentioned, that in most of the cases, it manifests itself in in policies and measures that either target or involve Internet, in some jurisdictions, and especially in Africa, even though they are not so many policies, yet, we are noticing that a lot of our ministers, our presidents are really enjoying using this word recently, I think last year, or if I'm not mistaken, the Senegalese President mentioned that they will be moving all the country's data to a local data center, because they do want to promote digital sovereignty.

So, what we're seeing is that for Africa, it looks like this concept is more of an extension of national sovereignty. Yeah, I think this doesn't really come as a surprise to most of us. Most of our countries were colonized, except Ethiopia. And I think the need to maintain the independence in the sort of sovereignty is quite key for quite a number of governments. So, you'd see that this concept, it takes a trend of territorial control, and that the Internet should be under the jurisdiction of governments. So, we really need to be checking if this is a good thing or a bad thing, because once this affect the fundamental principles of the Internet, we are likely going to have some challenges in future.

So, we are looking at this discussion with the lens of the Internet way of networking that my colleague Natalie mentioned, I think some of you might have gone through this. So, primarily, we are checking if all these decisions or this policies that are coming together that are being proposed, may not impact the Internet the way we see globally connected, again, open, trustworthy and secure Internet, which is, of course our mission. So, this is an important discussion we need to keep in mind.

Maybe let me also share briefly with you some of the policy trends that we're seeing across regions and what we terming themes or archetypes of digital sovereignty with the preliminary research that we're doing, we're noticing that governments sometimes they are talking about digital sovereignty in the spirit and proposal, these four things that you can see in the presentation. So, firstly is sometimes it comes is protecting the economy or at least getting more competition, especially from law firms, local interviewers. So, governments may make policies that are trying to promote competition, but in that it may be affecting the general trend or general stability of the Internet itself. And then in other countries in our region, we're also seeing law enforcement that are coming in, in different ways. Sometimes it comes as tax. Sometimes the law enforcement that is a bit stringent enforcing tech companies to follow certain policy or certain requirements. I wouldn't want to preempt, because I know some of my colleagues are going to share some examples of this. In Nigeria, in Mauritius, we're seeing some of these things coming

together. And sometimes it's also discussed, with the motivation of wanting to protect users or protecting the citizens. So, the idea of national security and cyber security also comes into play when the issues of digital sovereignty are being discussed.

So, we really need to put our mind and also keep checking, and also following all these discussions, because they might have a potential to affect the way we we know the Internet today. So, I think just to segue into the discussion for the day, that is, in summary, we are seeing governments justifying the need to control the Internet for the reasons that I mentioned. And they are saying this is in the spirit and purpose of digital sovereignty. So, we definitely need to be wary of those developments. And lastly, just like to invite you, again, we really value your contributions. And if you really want to learn more about this project, we certainly invite you to give some comments and things that you think could be the dynamics around digital sovereignty from your country. So, I hope this gives a little bit of insight into what we are also working on in relation to digital sovereignty and splinternet.

Thank you. And back to you, Victor.

Victor Ndonnang

Yes, thank you very much. Very good. And thank you, again, Ntalie for introducing these two topics. Nazar, you have a question?

Nazar Nichols Kirama

Yes. I just wanted to make a quick comment regarding the splinternet and the digital sovereignty. I think the concept of digital sovereignty emanates more from the point of what is it that is it in terms of global Internet? What is in it for the government? And I think in my opinion, that is where the issue of looking at how the local communities in terms of their government, how they can be able to benefit our have their citizens benefit from the global Internet. So, in itself, not very bad. Unless it goes above board, and begin to eat into the splinternet, in terms of thinking that, you know, you can now cut yourself from the rest of the Internet in terms of building your own infrastructure, and so on and so forth.

For example, in the last few years, we are talking about local content development. And we saw the traffic that was actually coming from the world to Africa, was on the ratio of 20% to 80%, meaning the local traffic that was coming to Africa for us was coming from the rest of the world to Africa, was around 80%. So, if you flip that 80/20 In terms of traffic, that is where the concept of digital sovereignty, I think, comes from.

However, the issue of splinternet is where policies and issues and discussions, centers around cutting yourself off from the rest of the Internet, and build your own infrastructure for your own use and your own data and so on and so forth.

So, I think to say a simple sentence, is that both of the issues are we need to integrate and engage the policymakers, the members of Parliament from our national parliaments and national assemblies, to ensure that they not only engage in terms of these issues, but also they become sort of permanent structures that we can use for future issues to ensure that we protect the Internet and avoid the issues of splinternet.ca Because most of the policymakers actually operate from the point of ignorance when it comes to technical issues. So, if we use our muscle as Internet Society to engage and inform and educate members of Parliament's and other section of the policymakers who will be in a far better position to continue to defend the Internet, and Internet way of networking, as well, as you know, lead to the standard that the framers of Internet wanted from the beginning.

That will be my comment, Victor, thank you.

Victor Ndonnang

Thank you very much. Nazar. So, Dawit, over to you.

Dawit Bekele

Thank you, Victor. Thank you, everyone, for participating to this very important call. And thank you also for Natalie, and Verengai, for the very enlightening presentations. The next session will be about a discussion around those topics. We'll have participants from the community. This is a call to discuss with us issues. This is the very important part of this call. We have among the panelists - - I think we have five panelists. The first one is Ithabeleng Moreke. And she is president of the Lesotho chapter. And she's been working with ISOC for quite some time. The second, and I'm very glad that we have ladies well represented today on the panel, is also very capable person who have been working with us for quite some time. Her name is Maud Ashong Elliot. She is vice president of the Ghana chapter. And she's also lecturer at the IT department at the University of Professional Studies, Accra, Ghana. The third one is Ernest Mafuta, who is chair of Affordable Internet Access special interest group. He is also an expert member of the Gambia ICT regulatory authority. The fourth panelist is Harold Adjaho, who is president of Internet Society Benin chapter. He is a software engineer, and IT consultant for the past 10 years. Last but not least, Emmanuel Ogu is an active member of ISOC Nigeria chapter, and also a chartered IT professional, a trained computer scientist and advocate for digital rights and freedom. And I'm happy to say that we have been working with Emmanuel on some issues that are very relevant to the discussion today.

So, maybe before starting the discussion with the panel, I would like to add a few things about what Natalie and Veronica have said. Very often, there are many things that we consider for granted. For example, you have water, you have electricity, you think that you'll always have water, you'll always have electricity, you will always have fuel at the gas pump until you don't have, and in Africa we know that very well. For example, I'm sure if I asked among the participants, how many of you have electricity problem or water problem? I think many of you have it. But did you really think about that, before you had it? Before you had it, you think it will never happen. But it happened. And the same thing with the Internet, we have today we have a global Internet, we can seamlessly talk to each other until the date, we want to be able to do that. And it will be very difficult to change things once they have happened.

That's why at the Internet Society, we believe that we need to prevent it, we need to make sure that it doesn't happen and not try to reverse something that has happened because once it's happened, it's very difficult to reverse. So, I think that's why it's not only ISOC as an organization, but the whole community has to work together because the Internet is something that really is important in our lives. We want an Internet that you know works the way we have seen it work in the last decades, for the next decade and also for the generations who will be cut off and that is very important.

So, without further ado, let me call upon the panelists so that they say a few words so that they can talk about this and then we'll have questions and answers. Let me start with Ithabeleng.

Ithabeleng Moreke

Hi, thank you very much for having me. Splintered Internet. It's very worrying factor and with such a small country, we have had so much political turmoil in the past recent years, which nearly led to the government wanting to censor and to moderate access to the Internet, and what people can post on social media and what people can access. So, yes, it's a quite a real effect for us as well, and needs to be included in this discussion. Thanks.

Dawit Bekele

Thank you. Next, Maud.

Maud Ashong Elliot

Thank you very much. Alright. Good afternoon, everyone. Happy to be here for us to discuss the topic of splinternet. For me, this might not have really started with my country. But there's a saying that there's no smoke without fire, so far as it is coming up, we should deal with it before it

becomes a canker. Thus, I think it's very good for us to start a discussion, and then deal with it now. Thank you very much.

Dawit Bekele

Thank you. Next, Ernest.

Ernest Mafuta

Hello, everyone. Well, for me, I do believe that this is a global issue in as much as it has not reached my country. But I believe we all have a role to play for us to keep before it spreads. I remember, for example, last year during election for the first time were the restriction to the Internet, and that was a very, very, very new experience for me and my fellow youth around the country. So, we ensure that such a process do not happen again. I think these meetings are meant for systems like this. So, I'm very happy that, today, we can talk about this issue and find the common resolution and how we can keep the Internet. Thank you.

Dawit Bekele

Thank you. Harold?

Harold Adjaho

Good evening, everyone. My name is Harold, allow me to speak in French. So, we are happy to be part of this initiative, and to discuss today the situation over the Internet and Africa. We want to share our experience in this regard in order to prevent Internet shutdowns. Thank you.

Dawit Bekele

Finally, Emmanuel.

Emmanuel C. Ogu

Good afternoon from Nigeria. So, the issue of splinternet and digital sovereignty is one that has been a front burner issue on the Nigerian scene in the last 12 to 18 months. Some of the community members may remember the infamous Twitter ban of last year, which lasted about seven months, up to January this year. And then recently, over the past two weeks, we've had another emergence of a code of practice by Nigeria's Information Technology Development Authority in Nigeria, and through the lens of these regulatory policy attempts and digital sovereignty. It is easy to empathize with the concerns the government has around these issues. I mean, the issues of disinformation and child safety, digital rights, hate speech, and radical extremism that the country has had to grapple with over the past few years. Very critical concerns. And with only a few months on to the next general elections, it is evident that these are issues that

would greatly endanger the democratic future of a country like Nigeria. So, it's easy to understand why the government is taking very decisive regulatory approaches on digital sovereignty.

But then, the bigger challenge is the approach which they have often followed, has been seen to not be very multistakeholder inclusive, and which has also been seen to endanger the Internet way of networking in ways that could result in a splinternet, and balkanized the frameworks that has made the Internet that open and globally connected infrastructure that we have relied on over the past few years, particularly since the pandemic.

So, yeah, these are critical issues that we have dealt with in the Nigerian space. And we continue to deal with and we continue to pursue more broad based and more inclusive approaches to dealing with these concerns, and interests in regulating digital sovereignty and regulation of the digital space. So, that the Internet way of networking is not endangered at all.

Dawit Bekele

Thank you. Thank you. Now my next question is, How would splinternet , if it happens, for example, tomorrow, impact your community or your communities? And are there any things that you think might lead toward the splinternet that might happen at the local level?

So, two questions to which I would like you to answer what would be the impact of a splinternet if it happened tomorrow, the impact on your community And is there anything local that might contribute to making the splinternet a reality? Ithabeleng? Can you start, and then Maud, Ernest, Harold, and Emmanuel.

Ithabeleng Moreke

Thank you. For us in Lesotho, we're still on a journey to get locals to appreciate what we can gain from the Internet. So, should we come upon this splinternet, this would cause us to go backwards. Because the people that we're bringing on board, the people that are yet to be connected to the Internet, they will not find what you're trying to sell, they will not find the Internet that we are trying to say, this is what you can get from the Internet. For instance, during the COVID pandemic, there are many businesses that went online. And that's selling their services online. And some even started operating from that time. So, if we, in this point in time get to where our Internet been censored and restricted, this will cause that that people have to not be a full fledged Internet experience. And for a country where many organizations that are trying to push the Internet are yet to realize the benefits, this will put us back but it will take down or it will discourage stakeholders that are trying to build or that are trying to push Internet penetration, trying to get

educators and educational institutions to get the benefit and to train and adopt is in the Internet access to expand education, which was quite a challenge during the COVID lockdowns.

So, should this be censored, this will cut down on the effort that we have already made in trying to get educators, education institutions, to appreciate how much we can achieve on using the Internet. So, from a country that are very far behind on using a benefiting from the open Internet, this would cut down our efforts and introduction.

On the second question on what could potentially bring us here, or bring us the splinternet, it's political influence mostly. In the past few years, we've had a lot of political disturbances, which affected many aspects of us. And it came to a point where the government wanted to censor social media, they wanted to censor access to the Internet, they want to shut down. Well, we didn't get there. But we have upcoming elections. And my fear is that the government in place could try and get hold of control of the Internet, to ensure that they have the upper hand, to ensure that they censor information, or people can only get access to what they want to say. That is mostly what could impact or what could lead to a splinternet. I hope it doesn't happen, because elections are coming in the next few months, but that is the greatest threat to the open Internet. Thanks.

Dawit Bekele

Thank you so much. So, Maud, please,

Maud Ashong Elliot

For me, a splinternet is a fragmented mini Internet. So, with this, if there are breaks i the way the Internet works, definitely we will all be at a disadvantage. You ask the question, what are some of the activities that might, you know, sort of show that there is splinternet? For splinternet, if there are many activities and where also power is also taken away from you, one major thing I see that countries might end up going into splinternet, or digital sovereignty, could be during the election period, where maybe the ruling government might decide that they will not want some info to get to other people, it has to only be about them. So, that could also happen. And also during splinternet, definitely they'll have disruption in communications all over the place. So, information definitely will not get to the right people, or it prevent information to get to the people we don't want them to get to.

We also realize that there will be some issues with interoperability in businesses. You realize that, now businesses want to connect to make things easier, all these things would happen when splinternet is involved. And I guess this is a time to make sure we talk about it, and then we deal with it. Thank you.

Dawit Bekele

Thank you. Earnest, you're next

Ernest Mafuta

Alright, so coming from the country that is not a digitally transformed, like Zambia, on the aspect of community, if splinternet would happen, I would say for us this would be a step backwards because number one, when it comes to the splinternet, we have got people who don't know even about the splinternet, and we have people who are already in businesses, who already are in community using the Internet. So, if that would happen, it would really disrupt the operation and also data flows. For example, I think one of the major issues, that would impact on us, is the issue of data. Allow me to say that data is the most important asset in the world. We all know that. The people who can control data, they control our future, they control our humanity.

Dawit Bekele

Yeah. Harold, can you continue?

Harold Adjaho

Yes, thank you. So, in Benin, we have progressed and we also have implemented reforms, especially for the economic development of our country. We have several public policies that we have implemented. We also have companies, local companies, that are using the Internet. So, we have this interoperability with Internet in our country, several companies that are working with the providers from abroad. So, if this splinternet actually happens in our country, we might regress and lose 10 years of progress in our country. And our objective is to make sure that the policies, the regulatory policies that are implemented, actually promote or build the Internet.

Dawit Bekele

Merci., Emmanuel?

Emmanuel C. Ogu

Yes, thank you. So, what are the most current threats to the Internet in Nigeria? I would say the regulatory attempts of governments to take hold of digital sovereignty concerns within the space are the most obvious threats, and how can these impact on the community? First of all, there is the issue of high cost of Internet access. During the Twitter ban of last year, there was the concern of trying to purchase and subscribe to VPNs to be able to access the Internet. And so when you add this to an already substantial cost of Internet access, there's a danger that the Internet could become an elitist commodity for those who are rich enough to afford cost of data connection and

the costs of bypassing mechanisms to be able to access certain resources on the Internet. And there's also the impact to businesses to manage the impact to the economy as well, in terms of, you know, revenue, that is lost tax revenue and advertising revenue that is lost when the Internet is down, especially around social media ecosystems. Yeah, thank you.

Dawit Bekele

Thank you very much. Well, in summary, I think the impact on Africa will be very high and very negative. And there are already some real concerns that might lead to the splinternet. So, I think there are already some worrying signs, and some work that we all have to do at global level, but also local level.

Victor Ndonnang

Thank you very much. I see some hands up, maybe some participants may have some comment to share. I see Tijani, and Jackson. So, Tijani first.

Tijani Ben Jamaa,

Thank you very much, Victor. Coming back to the digital sovereignty. Yes, you're right. Interest of any user of Internet is the unicity of Internet, and operability. But there is another side that you have to look at it. Their life, their data, their sovereignty, even that country are in danger, sometimes. So, that's why there is a tendency, or this trend of digital sovereignty. We have to look at it in this way. And we have to try as a society to try to find ways to influence so that this will not happen in the future. And that, in the future, we may find very good tools for data protection, for business protection, for everything that now are unfortunately used not in the right way. Thank you very much.

Dawit Bekele

Thank you very much, Tijani. And I think you raised a very relevant point, the governments, and people, have real concerns. We're not saying that everything that the government is doing is without any reason. They do have good reasons. But while doing that, they should also not break the Internet. They should find a solution that solves their problem without breaking the Internet. That what we're saying. I think Nazar and Jackson, very, very quickly. Less than one minute each, if possible.

Jackson Kaindume

Greetings, everyone. My name is Jackson. I'm from Namibia. I have very short questions. The first one is, can search engines contribute to splinternetting the Internet? For example, a lot of people, they don't know that Google is not the Internet. When you give them a web address, the first thing

they do is they use the Google search, and when the website does not show up, then that's all. So, can search engines contribute to splinternet? And then the last one is, can we use mesh networks maybe to solve a lot of these digital sovereignty and splinternet issues? Thank you.

Dawit Bekele

Yeah, well, there are risks that proprietary companies, and so on, create walled garden, where you think that you see the Internet, but you see just part of it. So, that has always existed and it exists. Yes, it is one of the concerns that we have, and we don't want a walled garden Internet, we want an Internet that is open for everyone.

And Nazar, you had your hand up.

Nazar Nichols Kirama

Yes. I have a question for Natalie. We have the splinternet program, as she has mentioned. To which extent is our strategy to counter splinternet, engaging the governments, the policymakers, especially, number one. Number two, we have the upcoming global Internet Governance Forum in Ethiopia this year, what strategy are you going to employ to engage the communities that are going to congregate in Ethiopia? Those will be my two questions to Natalie. Thank you.

Natalie Campbell

So, with regards to protecting the Internet, we have both proactive and reactive side to our strategy. The reactive side is that when we do spot threats, when we flagged threats, like I mentioned with our playbook strategy before, and it's really important for us to understand what the impact of these threats could be on the Internet, so that we can determine case by case, how do we go about mitigating this threat, whether it's a matter of discussing with governments and helping them understand what the impact of their decisions could be, or whether it's talking with businesses that could be making these decisions that could have a negative impact on the Internet.

For the most part, we really rely on community to let us know when these issues come up in our regions. We're a global organization, but the reality is we don't have presence in every country in the world. And so that's why we really rely on our members or chapters, our community, to flag threats and let us know what's happening. If there are threats that pop up, we encourage them to use our Internet Impact Assessment Toolkit to take on some of this analysis and strategy in order to do advocacy in a regionally relevant way in your region, because our community are the regional experts.

I would say that the proactive side of our advocacy is to really help governments understand that there is a tool that exists to help prevent making decisions that impact the Internet, and that's the Internet Impact Assessment Toolkit. So, when we go about our general engagement with governments that we do have relationships with, we promote using the Internet Impact Assessment to help themselves do their due diligence, to make sure that what they're proposing the decisions or the regulations that they're making don't harm the Internet, and especially don't harm it in a way that could lead to a splinternet.

Dawit, I don't know if you want to add anything to that.

Dawit Bekele

Thank you. Just to add to that, for Internet Society, defending the Internet has become a number one priority. If you don't have the Internet, then everything else is secondary. So, it is a priority. And wherever we go, it's going to be something that we'll be talking about it. We are going to talk about it. We have a session at the African IGF in Malawi. We have a proposal with other organizations on this issue at the IGF in Addis Ababa. And everywhere we go, we will have something about it.

And we also hope that you will talk about it everywhere in your country, because as you say, the threat is not only global, the threat is also local. What happens in Benin, or Tanzania, will have an impact on the global Internet. So, we want you to be the ambassadors of the Internet Society at the local level. Thank you.

Tidjani MAHAMAT ADOUM

I just want to say something about this subject, because this subject should be in the minds of all Africans. The splinternet is something that we experiment here in Mali, because there is an embargo of our regional organization and the international organization, the Malians are not free of their movement, they are not free of the interactions they can have. So, the fragmentation or the splinternet is something that is a risk that is real. And it's also a challenge for us, those who defend the Internet way of doing things, and we have to reflect on that together, and reflect on what kind of response we can bring. As Dawit said, how the governments are doing it, what are the reasons, should be known, but it should not be the right solution of the interrogations that they have. So, we have to help them find some solutions to let them not to go to the splinternet. So, we have to make our contribution to find some solutions to the challenge to help.

Dawit Bekele

Thank you, Tidjani.

Haji. Haji Ali?

Hadji Mmodi ALI

Thank you, Dawit. Thank you, Victor. This is a real pleasure to be with you and to discuss with you. What I would say is before before COVID-19 some governments were thinking of cutting the Internet because they were not aware of how much the Internet was useful. But because of COVID, now everybody knows the importance of the Internet. So, we have to change our strategy, how we plead to governments, to the decision makers, what Internet can bring, you know, today that the Internet is a necessity to our lives. I don't have the ideal solution. But we should not anymore be on the defensive side, we have to be offensive when there are elections, or when you have some events. In some countries, you know, the Internet is cut. So, we have to be really on the attack side, and to plead for not cutting Internet. I don't maybe have the ideal solution, but we can find some concrete solutions, real solutions, to not have these cuttings. Thank you.

Dawit Bekele

We need to be active and not just passive and wait for things to happen. And this is for all of us.

Bakoena? And that will be the last one.

Bakoena Manoto

Hi, thank you. I just wanted to touch on the issue of social media companies and the role that they're playing in digital sovereignty. I was hoping the panelist or anyone from the society can just touch on how social media are sometimes the cause of digital sovereignty. Like we saw in Nigeria, Twitter got banned after Twitter banned the president, and can also talk about Facebook during the Arab Spring, and how the role they play can also lead to Internet been cut off in our countries. Thank you.

Dawit Bekele

Thank you very much. I think with that, I would like to thank all the panelists. And thank you also for the participants, it's exciting to see the interest coming from everyone.

Dawit Bekele

So, I would let Lia continue so that you can hear also from her, because she has very important things to say.

Lia Kessling

Thank you. Hi, everyone. Great to see everybody. And thanks for hanging on for this extra time, what I'm going to talk about, it's just five things that you can do right now to help protect the Internet and stop the splinternet.

Visual always helps me so that's why I wanted to make this slide. So, if you're wondering, gosh, there's so much, I'm not sure even where to start, I often can feel like that, here's five simple things that you can do now.

One is, lots of people have talked about it on this call, you can assess the impact. If you see a threat to the Internet, or suspect there may be one, you can start to learn and use the Internet Impact Assessment toolkit. I know ISOC, Nigeria did some great job doing that and flagging a threat up to Natalie and her team. And thank you very much for that, Emmanuel. You can ask governments to protect the Internet, and share our explainer about the toolkit and what that means. A really great time to do that, and Victor will talk about it, is the upcoming Plenipotentiary Conference. And that's something just to keep in mind, it's a great moment to do something like this.

Innovate always. I love this. This is one of my favorite things to do with anyone, innovate, come up with new ideas, new approaches, new ways to get the word out, to build the Internet, to make it more secure, and develop a new solution together. Many of you are active on our members platform to solve problems, and that's Connect. So, many of you are there, so keep it up. That's exactly what that platform is there to build solutions and solve problems together.

You can upskill, you can take a course, apply for a fellowship, keep asking questions. That part I always do, I ask a ton of questions. Just keep building your skills and your knowledge.

And if you're on social media, you can spread the word using the #ProtectTheInternet hashtag. So, those are some five simple things you can do now. And that is all I have to say except, lovely to see you, and I can't wait to see you all again, hopefully in person soon.

Victor Ndonnang

Thank you very much. I think this was a very engaging spotlight. Thank you very much. I don't know, Dawit, if you want to add anything else before I...

Dawit Bekele

No, thank you. Lia was spot on. Thank you.

Victor Ndonnang

Thank you very much. And thank you again, Lia, for mentioning our Connect community, because most of the questions, the conversation that we started here, can continue online, can continue on these communities, so that we all mobilize, we all strategize, to really defend and protect the Internet.

Victor Ndonnang

So, we have one more item on the agenda today. You know, we have special interest groups. So, every two year during our action plan development, we call to our community to select some issue that they would like to work on as a community, and those issue becomes what we call special interest groups. So, on that, I would like to just give us a few minutes to just share what we have as special interest group and standing group, so that you can also participate and join other likeminded members there to share ideas. So, Hana, you have the floor?

Hana Sabbagh

Thank you, Victor, and hello everyone, I will try to be very quick and very brief. For those who are not familiar with the changes that took place last year, we have a new interest group model. And the new model includes two different types as Victor just said, we have the standing groups where topics are more permanent in nature and remain active as long as they provide value to the members. The second type is special interest group topic, where topics are selected by popular vote every two years by the community. The special interest groups and the standing groups are global in nature and are open to all, so if you are a global member, a chapter member, organization member, you are all welcome and encouraged to join any or all of these groups. It's open to everyone and it's global.

In quarter one of this year, the standing groups and special interest groups conducted their elections. In quarter two, they the leaders that were elected did work on their planning for the year. And now in quarter three and beyond, they will start implementing the plans that they came up with.

So, just very briefly, I will give you an idea about these groups. The three standing groups that we have now are the Accessibility Standing Group, that promotes and advocates the digital inclusion of persons with disabilities by providing support strategies and mechanisms that enable us to access our digital rights. The Gender Standing Group is working towards an Internet that can be inclusive, accessible, open, safe and a tool for women and gender diverse people to reach their goals, through community networking, capacity building, advocating for policies in their favor. The

last standing group is the ISOC Youth Standing Group that supports and promotes youth involvement from the regions and mainstream Internet governance discussions, and works towards achieving the Internet, the youth one, which is a more equitable and accessible one.

The special interest groups are five for this year. We have five topics, basically. We have the Affordable Internet Access, Cybersecurity, Internet for Education, the Internet of Things, and the Online Safety. Very briefly, the Affordable Internet Access Special Interest Group seeks to establish an end-to-end approach to the issue of affordable access, ranging from infrastructure device availability, policy and regulatory enablement. We have the Cybersecurity that promotes secure Internet accessible to everyone, the group educate, of course, develop and collaborate to further develop the Internet security community. And the Internet for Education envisions a world where one global Internet ensures inclusive and equitable quality education and promotes lifelong learning for all. The last two groups, the Internet of Things seeks to bring awareness to world of Internet of Things by training, collaboration, and knowledge sharing. Internet for human is being transformed as Internet of Things gradually as a group. The Online Safety Special Interest Group seeks to ensure Internet end users are equipped with necessary skills and knowledge in order to stay safe online. This is very brief about the groups, and our colleague Kyle Shulman is the person in charge of the special interest groups. Thank you very much.

Victor Ndonnang

Thank you very much. And one more thing, our upcoming community engagement opportunities, so that you are aware of, and then you can do a calendar for upcoming opportunity for us to get together online.

So, our upcoming event, Community Week. Most of you participated in the last year edition, it was the first one. So, we are redoing another one this year that will happen on the 6th and 7th of September. So, look out for the announcement that is coming, and all the other information, the link to register, and learn more on what we will celebrate, and what we share online during the 2022 Community Week.

And you also know the Internet Society will be celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. The Internet Society was founded in 1992. It has been 30 years, so that will be an opportunity also for us to get online all together to celebrate that anniversary.

Our 2022 ISOC Fundamentals program, the program that we designed to give our members, all of you, to have fundamental knowledge about the issues that we are working on. The program was closed on the 30th of June, but, because of the demand, we have decided to let it open until the

end of the year. You can go to E-learning platform, and you will find the program called ISOC Fundamentals 2022, and then you can participate. And the idea is for you to learn about this issues, and see what you can do at the local level, and share what you did with the community, so that you can inspire others.

And Dawit mentioned the ITU Plenipotentiary meeting that is coming. So, we're going to be having a special community call to talk more about that. I think Natalie mentioned the importance to talk to policymakers, and so we'll discuss that during that special call to see how you can engage with your country representative to the ITU, so that we all have to not let policy that can affect the Internet negatively happen. So, you look out for the invite on that.

Victor Ndonnang

So, on that, thank you again, very much. Thank you to all our community members. Thank you, Ithabeleng, Maude, Ernest, Harold. Thank you, Emmanuel, for joining us today to share your thoughts.. And thank you to all of you, the participants. Thank you Natalie, thank you Dawit. Thank you to all the colleagues who supported me to make this call happen and it won't be a success without your participation. So, thank you, again, all for taking time to be online with us. And hopefully we'll have an opportunity to meet face to face in a very upcoming future. So, thank you again.