

Rodney Taylor

My participation in the Internet Governance Forum 2008 (IGF) was nothing short of fascinating. I was one of two persons from the Caribbean region to have attended as a result of a Canadian sponsored ITU fellowship awarded through the DiploFoundation Internet Governance Capacity Building Programme (IGCBP). I am from the small Caribbean island of Barbados with a population of just over 275,000, much less than even a small city in most developed countries. We are known for our beautiful beaches, warm sunshine all year round, friendly people and stability of our political system, all of which have contributed in some way to our development since becoming independent in 1966. I take full advantage of our location in the Caribbean Sea and scuba dive on beautiful coral reefs whenever I get the opportunity.



I manage the information systems division in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Barbados and from time to time would give policy input on national IT policy issues. However, the IGCBP dissected the bigger issues of Internet Governance (IG) in a comprehensive way and it became evident that these go beyond the narrow scope of just technical policy issues. This is where my interest really started to grow and I saw the opportunity to move in a different direction professionally.

Of course I had heard of the IGF because I have been in the field of Information Technology for close to 15 years and have an interest in global issues related to the Internet. I manage the information systems division in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Barbados and from time to time would give policy input on national IT policy issues. However, the IGCBP dissected the bigger issues of Internet Governance (IG) in a comprehensive way and it became evident that these go beyond the

narrow scope of just technical policy issues. This is where my interest really started to grow and I saw the opportunity to move in a different direction professionally. More on that later.



Since I am in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Foreign Trade, I believe that I can hone my diplomatic skills and draw on my IT experience and understanding of critical Internet issues to participate and advance the interests of small developing countries in Internet governance. This is something I am looking forward to doing in the very near future and have already started the process since leaving the IGF.

I studied intellectual property rights and Internet voting and along with a diverse group of students from across the globe, did research on the future of IG arrangements. Our online discussions were always stimulating as everyone brought a unique perspective to the issues being discussed. Of course when the opportunity was presented to attend the IGF in India I was very excited to be at what I considered to be the Mecca of Internet Governance stakeholders. With so many workshops to choose from it was difficult to be selective especially knowing that I was the only one from Barbados and I wanted to be able to report to our policy makers on all of the major issues. Given the disparity between the participation of developing and developed countries it was clear that more support was needed for the former group to be able to understand the issues and make a meaningful input.

I was able to participate in workshops that focused on Cybersecurity and Cybercrime, Network Neutrality, Privacy and Capacity Building. I was also involved in two debates on Internet voting and the future of Internet governance arrangements and did a brainstorming session on future world scenarios, all organized by the DiploFoundation. I was also a part of the Diplo simulated negotiations between governments, the private sector



This was one of the most stimulating exercises because essentially it brought out the complexities of international negotiations that included stakeholders other than governments. It embodied the essence of the IGF in the sense that I saw the forum as being a place for building International consensus on critical Internet issues that require international co-operation and co-ordination.



and civil society on Internet governance arrangements. This was one of the most stimulating exercises because essentially it brought out the complexities of international negotiations that included stakeholders other than governments. It embodied the essence of the IGF in the sense that I saw the forum as being a place for building international consensus on critical Internet issues that require international co-operation and co-ordination. In other words it was great to talk and discuss issues but how do we deal with the difficult task of reaching international consensus and producing some tangible outcomes, perhaps in the form of an international treaty in everyone's interest and by which we can all abide? This is the more difficult task but clearly we cannot get there without the kind of open dialogue for which the IGF allows.

I was also impressed by the dedication of the Diplo delegation. This was manifest in the daily briefings and activities that took place outside of the official IGF programme, such as the debates and negotiations and the information they disseminated from the Diplo booth in the IGF village. The networking opportunities were also tremendous. I was able to personally question one of the 'fathers' of the Internet, Bob Kahn, on his thoughts on the way the Internet has developed since its 'birth' and how he thinks it will look in the future. I also exchanged contacts with key Internet players and as one result I'm getting involved in a Commonwealth Secretariat workshop on developing national ICT strategies, being hosted for Caribbean Commonwealth countries early in 2009 in Barbados. There is also the online Diplo IGF Hyderabad Community which I see as an online resource to which I can refer and also share different country experiences on Internet governance issues, since most of the participants work in key policy development areas within their own countries.

Now on to how it has affected me professionally! I am in the process of changing the focus of my career as I mentioned earlier, to get more involved in regional and national policy issues and more specifically in the areas of Internet governance and e-commerce. The latter I studied for my MSc in Management and Information systems at the University of Manchester, Institute for Development Policy and Management in the UK. The IGCBP and the IGF gave me the 'push' I needed to move in this direction which I think will be more rewarding for me.

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I believe that the question of future Internet governance arrangements is one of the most critical issues discussed in India because the IGF has a finite existence. What happens after this? The Internet is too important to leave its management to ad hoc arrangements or in the hands of a few powerful interest groups. International diplomacy will play a vital role in reaching a consensus on both the form that an international IG organization should take and the role that it can play under international law. Since I am in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Foreign Trade, I believe that I can hone my diplomatic skills and draw on my IT experience and understanding of critical Internet issues to participate and advance the interests of small developing countries in Internet governance. This is something I am looking forward to doing in the very near future and have already started the process since leaving the IGF. ■





A row of white classical columns with a red 'EXTRACT' sign. The sign is a red-bordered rectangle with the word 'EXTRACT' in red, slanted, uppercase letters. The background is a grayscale image of the columns, with a semi-transparent dark gray area at the bottom containing the main title and subtitle.

EXTRACT

*This extract was originally published as part of the report:
Capacity Development: How the Internet Governance
Forum empowered people from developing countries*

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT:

How the Internet Governance Forum
empowered people from developing countries